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PSP® PlayStation Portable
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PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

064 November 2012

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

RESIDENT EVIL 6

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 64 (November 2012)

The survival horror epic returns and we play it first!

WIN RE6!
See page 25

REVIEWED
- Borderlands 2
- Tekken Tag Tournament 2
- Transformers: Fall of Cybertron
- Sound Shapes

ALIEN CONSPIRACY
Why XCOM: Enemy Unknown is the best new game not on your radar

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

BORDERLANDS® 2

IN STORES NOW

PS3

PlayStation Network

MATURE 17+ ™

M

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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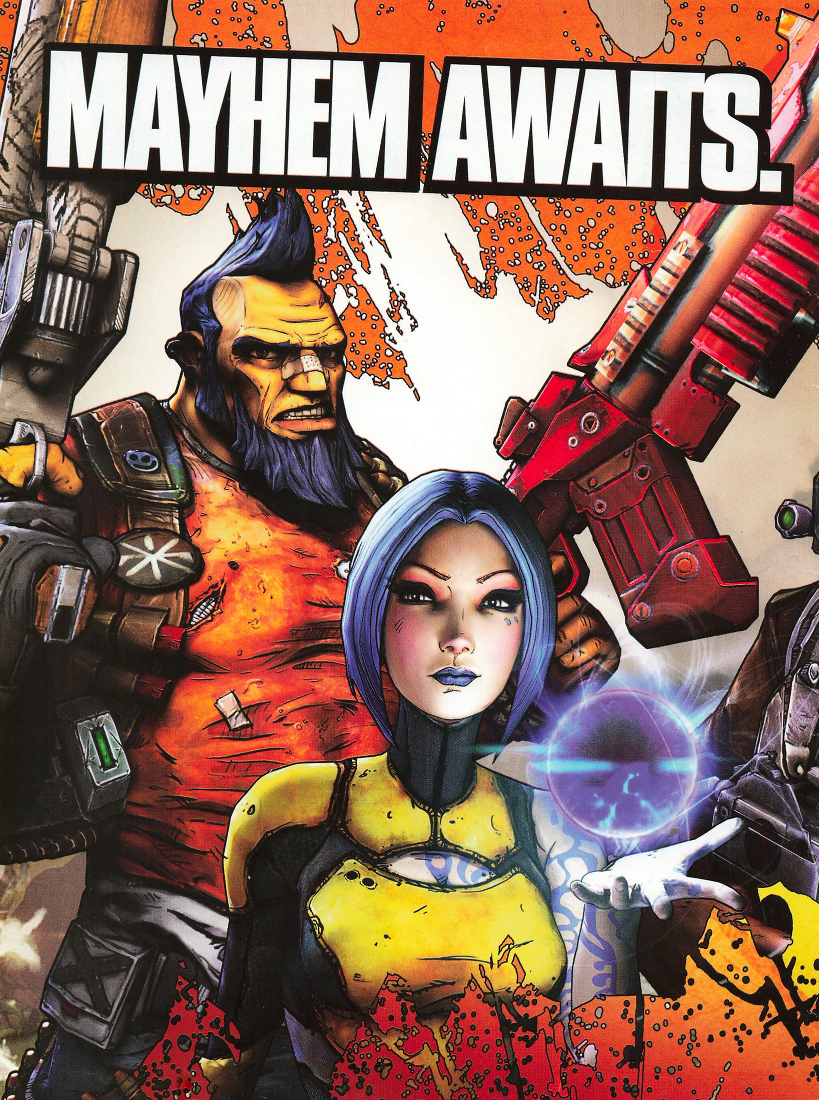
MAYHEM AWAITS.

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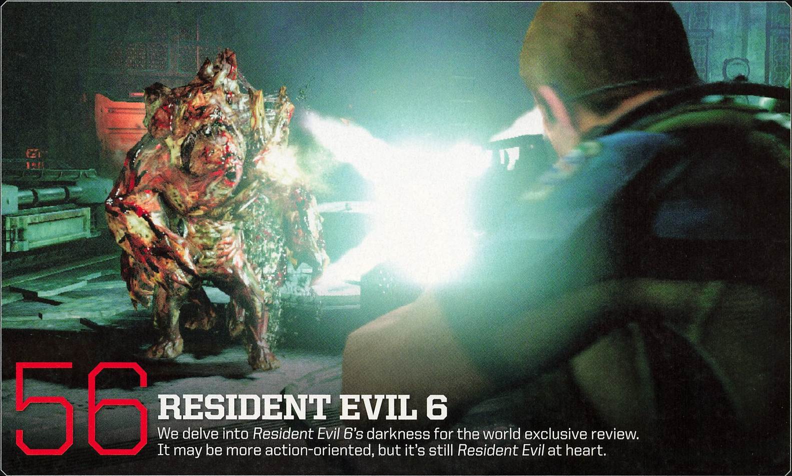
COVER FEATURE



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We delve into *Resident Evil 6's* darkness for the world exclusive review. It may be more action-oriented, but it's still *Resident Evil* at heart.

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64 XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

These aliens are going to rue the day they thought they could mess with Earth.

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Guns, guns, CL4P-TP, and more guns. *Borderlands 2* really does have it all.

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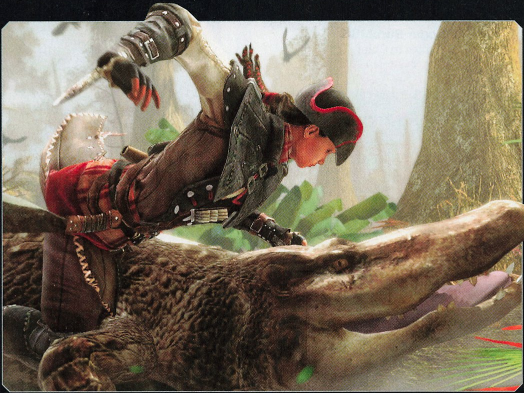

26 ASSASSIN'S CREED III: LIBERATION
Whips, alligator wrasslin', fancy clothes... *Assassin's Creed: Liberation* is pulling out all the stops to get us hooked on Aveline and PS Vita. Congratulations. It's totally working.

30

Long Time Coming

Big games and PTOM digital edition arrive

This is the issue that makes me feel that the 2012 holiday season has officially arrived. We've got timely and exclusive reviews of two of the year's most anticipated games: *Resident Evil 6* and *Borderlands 2*. Crack editors Mikel Reparaz and Scott Butterworth break down the pros and cons of the games in their reviews, but the one thing that stood out to me about both these games is their length.

Anyone who's regularly followed my ramblings in PTOM knows that I frequently grouse about the move toward shorter and shorter game experiences. As intense as some of these campaigns may be, I can't help but feel disappointed when they come to an end in just a few short hours. So all credit to Capcom and 2K Games for bucking the trend with *RE6* offering 30-plus hours and *Borderlands* offering well over 50-plus hours of play. (Note: these hour figures are conservative. Most gamers will likely play far longer.) And here's hoping it's the start of a new era for games that'll keep us enthralled for longer than a measly day or two.

Speaking of time, it's also about time PTOM joined the digital age. We're happy to announce that *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* is now available through Apple Newsstand, Google Play, Zinio, and Amazon's Kindle Newsstand (and coming to Barnes & Noble's Nook soon). Rest assured, we'll continue to publish the print edition, but now the option exists to enjoy each PTOM issue on a computer, smartphone, or tablet device. See pg. 93 of this issue for QR codes/links to your preferred digital outlet.

A caveat: we're currently unable to bundle print and digital subscriptions. It's something we're actively looking into, but if you're interested in the digital edition, we humbly submit that the $19.99/year subscription is the best value. Enjoy!

Roger Burchill
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/RogerPTOM

Dan Fitzpatrick
Art Director
twitter.com/danfpatrick

Just for fun, we asked Dan Fitzpatrick: If he could be any vehicle, what would he be? He simply said, "Hearse." We didn't question it and backed away slowly.

Scott Butterworth
Senior Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

Scott Butterworth said he would be a fixie bicycle. When we told him that wasn't really a vehicle, he told us we weren't really people. That really hurt our feelings, Scott.

Mikel Reparaz
Executive Editor
twitter.com/Wikiparaz

Mikel Reparaz is fly like a G6, so we weren't surprised when he told us that was his vehicle of choice. We *were* surprised when he started making jet noises at work.

Anne Lewis
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

We were a bit surprised when Anne Lewis said she would be a steamroller. Apparently she always wanted to be a part of the end of *The Naked Gun*.

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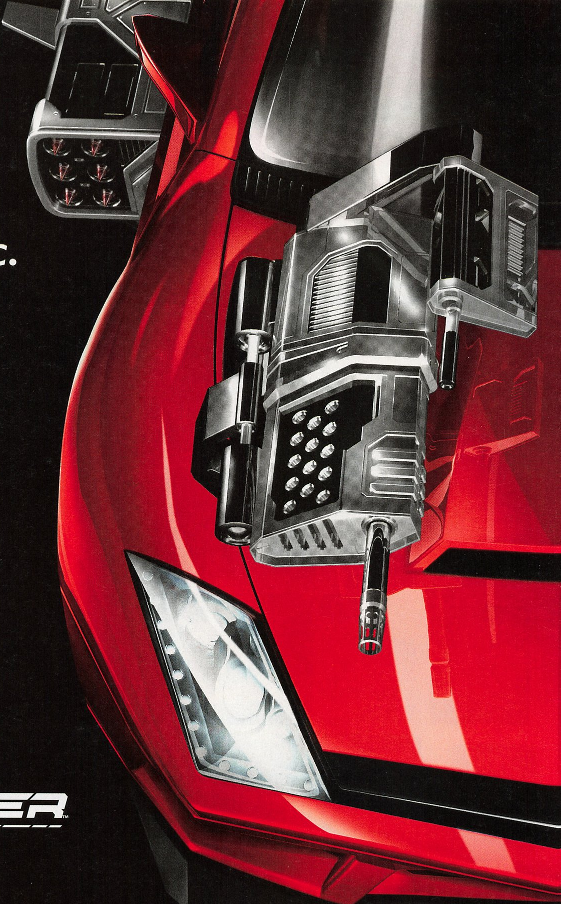

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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

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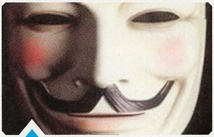
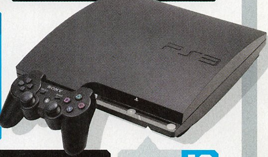
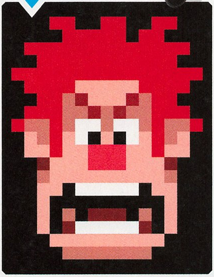
MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY



NOV 02

Get Wrecked
Wreck-It Ralph is in theaters today, and we promise we're not just mentioning it because it's about videogames... Okay, that's exactly why we're mentioning it.





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Remember, Remember
Guy Fawkes Day may not mean as much in America, but it's a good excuse to pull out *V for Vendetta* (comic or movie).

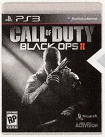
05

Romancing the Stone
Can you blame us for wanting this birthday girl to grace our calendar? Emma Stone is just so...*everything*. We can't help ourselves.

In Stores
LittleBigPlanet Karting, NASCAR The Game

10

First Grade
On this day in 2006, our favorite console first saw life in the U.S. That's right: The PS3 is now six years old.



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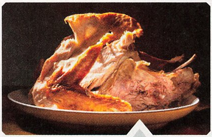
Not-So-Secret Ops
We're ready to take to the future, then back to the past, and then to the future again in *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*.

In Stores
Ben 10: Omniverse



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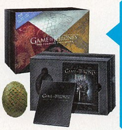
Magic Paint
We like videogames (duh). We also like Disney. *Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two*, out today, is the sliver in the middle of that Venn diagram.



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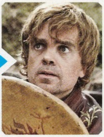
Blu-ray of Thrones
Game of Thrones fans can now get the Blu-ray first-season Collector's Edition sans the decapitated George Bush mask scene.

In Stores
PS All-Stars: Battle Royale, Hitman: Absolution



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Thanksgiving
Our stomachs are gorged with turkey and pie. Now it's time to go home and sleep until our neighbors think we're dead and call the police.

21

Black Friday
Why?! Why do we do this every year? We say, "Oh, I'll just pick up a couple of Blu-rays," and the next thing we know we're punching nuns at Best Buy to snag a hot new flatscreen TV.

24

Cyber Monday
Now this is what we should be saving all our money for. Why bother leaving the house when we can do all of our bargain hunting from our desks?

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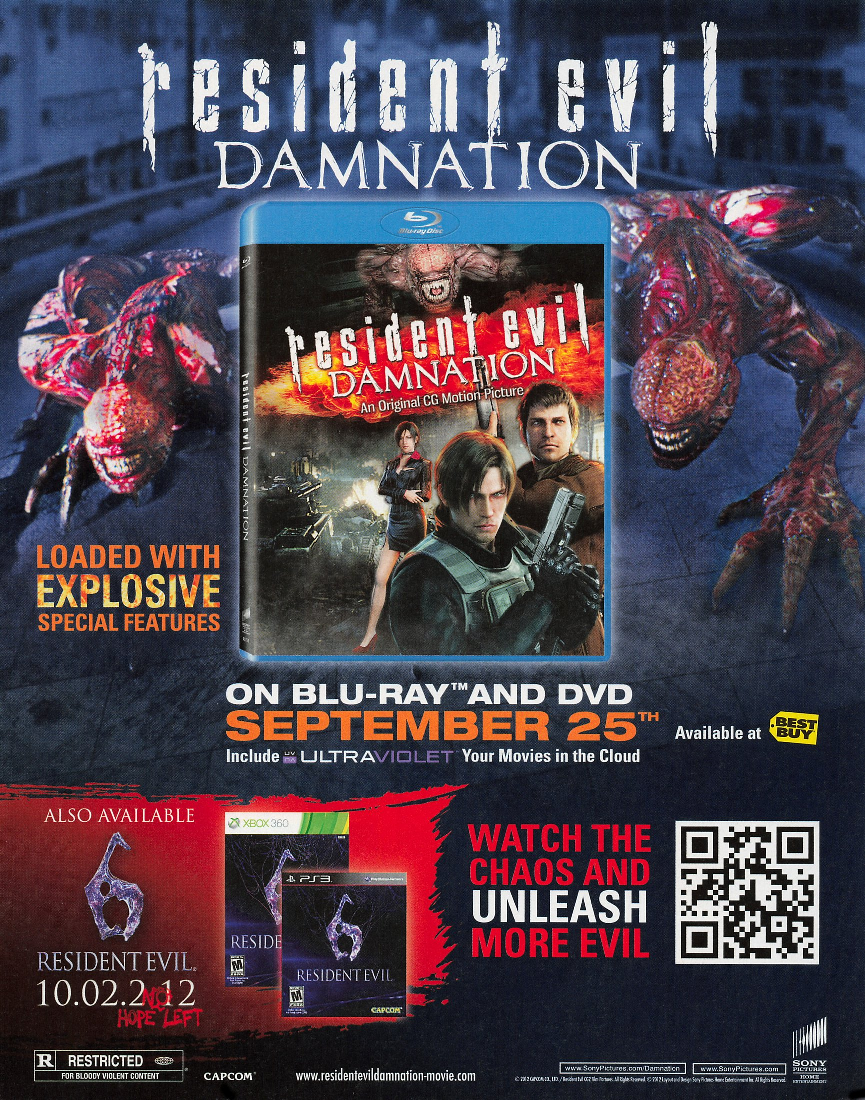
Emma Stone photo by Steve Rogers. Crowd photo ©iStockphoto.com/Icepparo. Release dates are subject to change by the publishers.



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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Kirkman Speaks
Walking Dead creator tells us what he thinks of Telltale's game.
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Mind Raider
Remember Me shows us a world where memory is stolen and sold.
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Handy Dandy
Big games and killer deals are headed PS Vita's way.
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Tier One Tales
MOH: Warfighter's producer talks about telling an authentic story.
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The Great Debate
PTOM editors beg to differ on the merits of multiplayer leveling.
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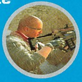


1

Unusual Suspects

Sony continues its campaign against sequelitis with four fresh IP announces

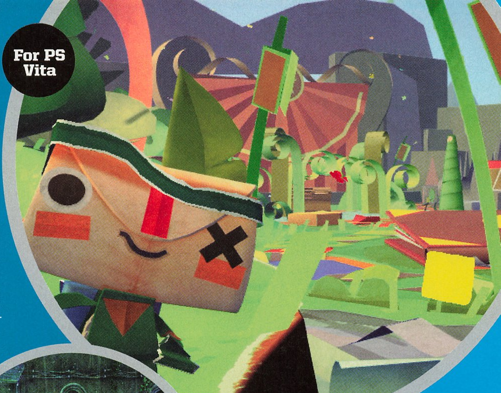
By all accounts, Sony had an electrifying showing at this summer's Gamescom, the world's largest videogame trade fair housed in Cologne, Germany. Much of the excitement came from its focus on brand new titles: four, in fact, all of which buck the industry's predilection towards existing brands and instead explore fresh experiences. The welcome news also touches many different corners of the PlayStation universe, with these debuts planned for PS3, Vita, Move, and PSN, respectively. Here's a closer look at Sony's next big original games.

Tearaway

ETA **TBD 2013** Dev **Media Molecule**

Developed by *LittleBigPlanet* creator Media Molecule, this wonderfully charming affair utilizes PS Vita hardware in a variety of distinct ways as we interact with a world made from paper. Iota, the adorable lead, holds a special message in his envelope-shaped head, and it's up to us to help him on his way through myriad puzzles and obstacles to reach his destination.

Rubbing fingers along Vita's rear touchpanel sends virtual digits into the game world, which can tear through the ground to chase and smash enemies, or move large objects. Tapping fingers, on the other hand, helps Iota jump, and we can blow into the microphone to generate gusts of wind or turn the Vita sideways to get a better look at the world. *Tearaway* has the spunk of *LBP* with a whole new look and mechanics, and should be a must-play handheld original.

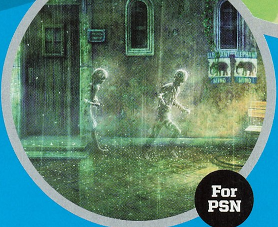


Until Dawn

ETA **TBD 2013** Dev **Supermassive Games**

Like the teen slasher films that inspired both its premise and campy dialogue, *Until Dawn* stars several attractive young people who are blissfully unaware of the likely terrible fate that awaits them. Where this PS Move exclusive differs is in our ability to potentially avoid such grisly outcomes by using the motion-sensing remote in numerous ways, including as a flashlight to examine the surroundings or as a character's hand to interact with switches and other environmental objects.

While many Move adventures stick to guided paths to streamline the action, *Until Dawn's* world is freely explorable, allowing us to switch between characters to uncover the mystery held within a creepy cabin in the woods. It's just the kind of game that the Move needs: a violent, mature-themed adventure that's designed around the wand, but doesn't seem unduly simplified as a result.



Rain (working title)

ETA **TBD 2013** Dev **SCE Japan Studio**

Sony has released minimal details about this upcoming PSN release from Japan Studio and the PlayStation C.A.M.P. team, but it's arguably the most fascinating game of the bunch. Set in a dark, urban city, *Rain* stars a young boy who chases after a mysterious girl—and finds himself turned invisible in an unknown world, only visible to the naked eye when doused in a downpour. So begins what appears to be a platform/action game with a puzzling twist, as the boy's actions and movements alert enemy beasts while in the rain, though he remains safely unseen when beneath shelter.

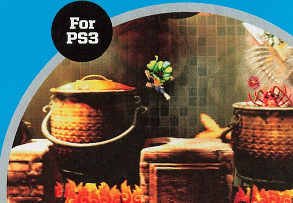
The lightly cel-shaded world almost recalls a less-stylized *Gravity Rush* (also by Japan Studio), though the overall aesthetic seems more primed to match the beautifully creative and wondrous approaches of *Journey* and *The Unfinished Swan*, with a plaintive piano ballad underpinning the affecting early footage. *Rain* has all the hallmarks of being PSN's next sublime melding of art and game.

Puppeteer

ETA **TBD 2013** Dev **SCE Japan Studio**

Designed in the mold of side-scrolling platform classics, *Puppeteer* is a brand new adventure from a small team within Sony's Japan Studio—but the game they're making hardly has tiny ambitions. It's set in a mysterious theater, where the latest production is titled "The Perilous Journey of a Boy Named Kutaro"; and in an unsurprising twist, we take the role of the child-turned-headless-puppet as he fights through the dazzling scenery.

Puppeteer nails its target aesthetic with fabric backdrops and ever-present curtains—not to mention aural audience reactions—that make it seem like the game is truly taking place on a stage. Armed with gargantuan magical scissors, Kutaro can cut his way through the levels to battle enemies and even navigate upward along string paths. What we've seen thus far of this retail PS3 release looks gorgeous, and has us itching to learn more.



2 Talking Dead

Walking Dead creator Robert Kirkman spills his guts about Telltale Games' hit episodic adventure series

Photo by Megan Mack

Mostly Dead

Though we haven't reviewed each individual episode (Episode One did earn a 9/10 from us), the first three *Walking Dead* games are currently available on PSN, with the final two scheduled to launch within the next couple months. Once all five are out, check back for a comprehensive roundup review!

"Licensed game" is a bit of a dirty word, yet *The Walking Dead* games have done well with fans and critics alike. What, in your mind, has allowed these games to overcome this stigma?

I've got to give Telltale the credit there. It's their unique take on the property. The team at Telltale absolutely loves *The Walking Dead,* and they've been fans of the comics for years. They get what *The Walking Dead* is about.

Tell us a little about your role in the project.

[Telltale] would come and discuss things with me and I would say, "That's great" or I would say, "That's cool, but maybe we could do this," but largely it was the Telltale group working with [writer] Gary Whitta to craft this story, and I was basically just sitting back and watching them make me look good, which is always fun.

Have you had a chance to actually play the finished products? What do you think so far?

I've played the game. It's a lot of fun. It's really cool. I actually paid for it because I didn't know how to get a download code to work, because I'm a bit of an idiot when it comes to videogame stuff. One of the really cool things is that I see people online saying things like, "Holy crap, the videogame is better than the comic!" When I get done crying after I read something like that, it's really just exciting to me to know that people are responding to it as well as they are. I think that's a great thing.

Were there any moments in the first few episodes of the game that really stood out to you?

[Spoiler alert!] I will say in the first game, the emotional impact of Lee standing over his brother and having to make that decision to bash his brains in and everything that went into that is really a testament to how far videogames have come. We were a block jumping over another block while a block chased us, and now we're getting really upset watching a person make this kind of horrific decision and actively participating in the decision-making process. I was very touched by that scene, and I thought it was very impressive.

How do you feel about giving your creation over to another team?

I don't know a lot about videogames, so really the thing that makes *The Walking Dead* work...is that I am able to team with people who know exactly what they're doing and give them some level of control over that medium. I'm still very much involved in all aspects of that, but I'm not going to be a comic book writer saying, "No no no, it's cool if a videogame does this," because at the end of the day, I'm not a videogame expert and you kind of have to recognize that.

Recently Telltale announced that they plan on making a second season after these first five games. Are you going to remain involved?

My level of involvement will not change. I had a really good time working with Telltale. Unless they hate me for some reason, but I think contractually they aren't allowed to hate me.

3

Mind Game

Capcom's intriguing *Remember Me* brings a memorable new twist to action adventure

PS3
PlayStation Network
REMEMBER ME
RP
CAPCOM

Aside from looking good in tight jeans, Nilin's talents include martial arts and exploring minds.

French developer Dontnod Entertainment was creating the sci-fi action game *Remember Me* two years before director Christopher Nolan's *Inception* hit theaters. *Remember Me's* game director, Jean-Max Moris, jokes that Nolan copied his game. If anything, the fact that the game studio could reference *Inception* made it an easier sell to publisher Capcom, which now has franchise plans for the sexy elite memory hunter Nilin.

Remember Me began life as *Adrift*, and was actually shown at Gamescom 2011 to publishers under that name. At one point, the game was a PS3 exclusive in development under Sony's direction, but the developer wanted to take its gameplay and storyline in a different direction. That direction was fine with Capcom, which unveiled *Remember Me* at this year's Gamescom.

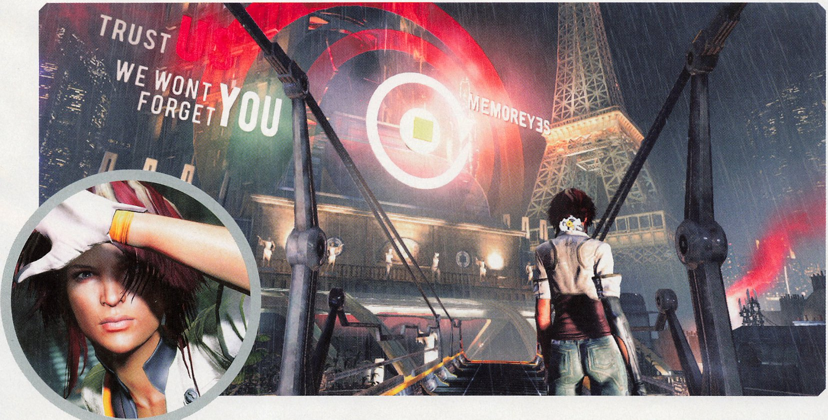
Set for a May 2013 release, *Remember Me* sends players on a quest to find Nilin's memories, which her former employers wiped clean while she was detained in the Bastille prison. The game world takes identity tracking a lot further than present-day Facebook and Twitter sharing, as personal memories can be digitized, bought, sold, and traded. Within this surveillance society, elite memory hunters police the very minds of the populace—a concept that makes George Orwell's *1984* seem almost quaint. (It's not a coincidence, then, that the game is set in Neo-Paris circa 2084.)

Dontnod is devising *Remember Me* to focus half of its gameplay on action, combat, and brawling, with the other half offering exploration, traversals, and puzzles to solve. Moris promises that the third-person perspective action adventure game will have a deep combat system for gamers to play with in this "multi-layer experience."

In addition to possessing melee combat skills and exceptional aim with weapons, Nilin has the ability to enter people's minds to change or steal their memories. This has opened up a new type of gameplay called memory remix, which Moris calls "a super dynamic puzzle that is tightly interwoven with the narrative and the concept." Essentially, Nilin can enter the mind of other characters, but there can be *Butterfly Effect*-like consequences that will influence the overall story.

Remember Me's cyberpunk look sets the game apart from the genre crowd. We'll explore various class-based layers of the city as Nilin hunts down her memories, and along the way, take up the fight against her former employers. While there's still a lot more to be revealed about the game, the first look showcased a promising new gameplay concept.

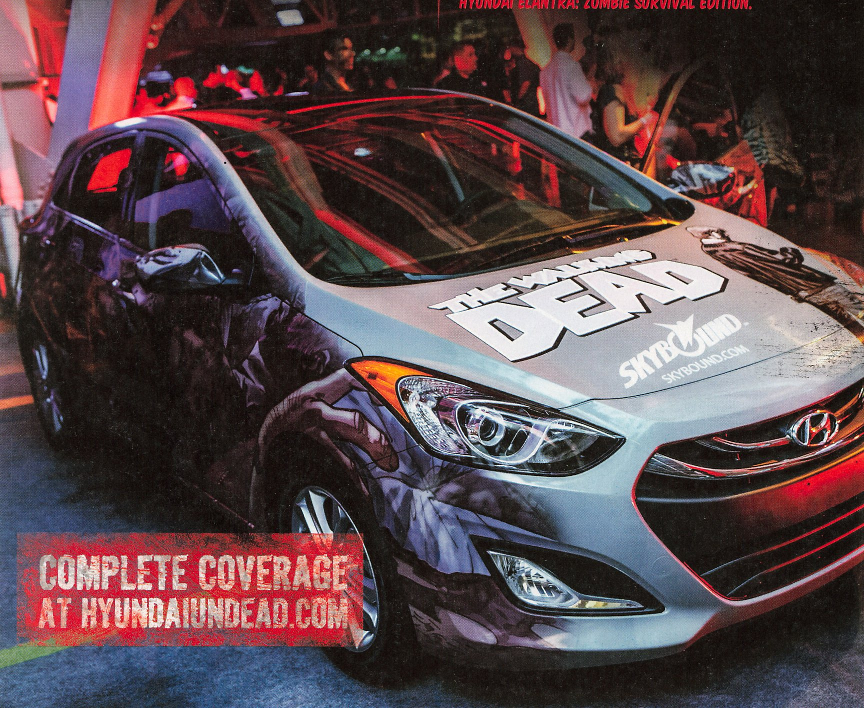
We haven't visited Paris in a game since *Battlefield 3*, so we're looking forward to this already.



HYUNDAI UNDEAD

Future
HYUNDAI
OWNER'S MANUAL
2013

IN HONOR OF THE WALKING DEAD'S RECORD-BREAKING 100TH ISSUE FOR IMAGE COMICS/SKYBOUND, HYUNDAI AND THE WALKING DEAD WRITER/CREATOR ROBERT KIRKMAN JOINED FORCES TO CELEBRATE THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE IN STYLE AT THIS YEAR'S SAN DIEGO COMIC-CON! IN ADDITION TO ZOMBIE SHOOTING GALLERIES, MAKE-UP ARTISTS GIVING OUT FREE HEAD WOUNDS, AND TOSSING OUT TONS OF EXCLUSIVE TWD SWAG, WE ASKED ROBERT KIRKMAN TO DESIGN THE HYUNDAI ELANTRA: ZOMBIE SURVIVAL EDITION.


THE WALKING DEAD
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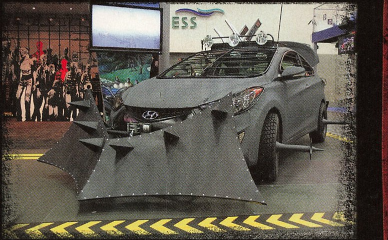
COMPLETE COVERAGE
AT HYUNDAIUNDEAD.COM



HYUNDAI ELANTRA: ZSE UNVEILING

AMONG THE MANY OTHER UNDEAD FESTIVITIES, THE WALKING DEAD WRITER/CREATOR ROBERT KIRKMAN DESIGNED A FORTIFIED 2013 HYUNDAI ELANTRA COUPE WITH STEEL PLATING AND PRACTICAL WEAPONRY. IT WAS THEN SKETCHED OUT BY SKYBOUND CONTRIBUTING ARTIST MATT ROBERTS, ENGINEERS FROM DESIGN CRAFT WELDED THE UNTOUCHABLE BEAST INTO EXISTENCE, AND COMIC-CON ATTENDEES GOT TO JUMP BEHIND THE WHEEL TO EXPERIENCE A MUCH SAFER LIFE AHEAD OF THE HERD.

COSTUME CONTEST

COMIC-CON COSPLAY MEETS GORE GALORE! WE ROUNDED UP THE MOST HORRIFIC ZOMBIE COSTUMES ON THE SDCC SHOWFLOOR AND PUT THEM TO THE TEST AGAINST A PANEL OF ZOMBIE EXPERTS IN ORDER TO WIN EXCLUSIVE COMIC-CON PRIZES AND SIGNED WALKING DEAD COMICS.

BLACK CARPET EVENT

THE WALKING DEAD'S 100TH ISSUE QUICKLY BECAME, LITERALLY, THE BESTSELLING COMIC OF THE CENTURY, SO YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE A CELEBRATION WAS IN ORDER! WE ROLLED OUT THE BLACK CARPET AT PETCO PARK AND THE STARS CAME OUT IN HERDS TO CELEBRATE THIS INCREDIBLE UNDEAD MILESTONE.

HYUNDAI | NEW THINKING. NEW POSSIBILITIES.
SKYBOUND SKYBOUND.COM
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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

4

Vitality

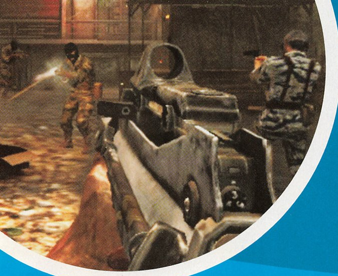
A new purchase program and big name games energize PS Vita

With PS Vita inching up toward PS3-quality graphics and gameplay, we're beginning to see more and more games announced for both platforms, with some offering shared multiplayer and even save support. But one big question has lingered amidst these developments: Would owners of both systems need to purchase the same game twice to be able to enjoy it wherever they please?

Luckily, Sony turned that question mark into an exclamation point at the recent Gamescom convention, announcing a new Cross Buy initiative that allows those who purchase the PS3 version of select multiplatform releases to also download the Vita game free of charge. *PlayStation All-Stars: Battle Royale*, *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time*, and *Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault* are the first announced titles to feature the program in action, and even buying the retail Blu-ray disc version of a game will still grant access to the PSN download on Vita.

But Cross Buy isn't the only digital initiative that should have Vita fans smiling later this year. Sony also announced that PlayStation Plus will soon extend to the handheld, delivering the same kinds of deals and free games we've seen on PS3—and that its cloud storage for saved games has been bumped from 150MB to 1GB per user.

As always, though, it's new games that generate the most excitement, and Vita has a bright future ahead of it this fall and beyond, thanks in part to these three big franchise entries announced or shown in greater detail at Gamescom.



Call of Duty: Black Ops Declassified

ETA **November** Dev **Nihilistic Software**

We've gotten a fresh look at Activision's *Black Ops* Vita spinoff, which is being developed by Nihilistic, the studio behind *Resistance: Burning Skies*. Unlike the upcoming *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*, which refreshes the familiar multiplayer approach in many key ways, *Declassified* aims to offer a more traditional online experience for up to eight players over Wi-Fi.

Classic play modes like Team Deathmatch and Kill Confirmed are included, as are Prestige levels and customizable loadouts, the latter of which can be shared with local pals via Vita's Near functionality. And for *Black Ops* campaign fans, *Declassified's* single-player component takes place between the two PS3 entries, with characters like Mason and Woods returning. Nihilistic's game certainly *looks* like the *Call of Duty* we know and love. With luck, it'll play and feel like it too.

Need for Speed: Most Wanted

ETA **October** Dev **Criterion Games**

Past portable *Need for Speed* titles rarely looked much like their PS3 counterparts aside from shared thematic elements, but that's thankfully not the case with Criterion's *Need for Speed: Most Wanted*. With development efforts handled in-house, the Vita release is said to be nearly identical to the open-world PS3 take, which means vast, explorable roads are available wherever desired.

It's a refreshing change of pace, and one that's sure to pay dividends for publisher Electronic Arts, as *Most Wanted* is looking fantastic on PS3, and the ability to bring that large and exciting of an experience to Vita should make it one of the biggest titles of the holiday season. Multiplayer against PS3 drivers didn't make the cut, unfortunately, though EA says it's considering Cross Buy support for the two versions. Fingers crossed!

SONY
¥1550
SELECT
START
PS VITA

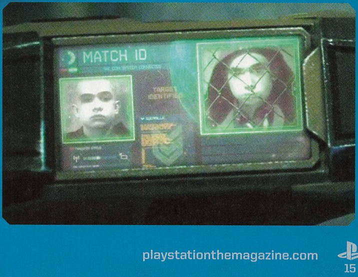
Killzone: Mercenary

ETA **TBD 2013** Dev **Guerrilla Games**

Due out in 2013, *Killzone: Mercenary* puts a fresh spin on the shooter series by putting us in control of hired killers, who carry out missions that neither the ISA or Helghast are up for. As a freelance operative, we'll be able to customize our loadout before executing contract missions, while traversing terrain similar to those found in the console entries.

Built on the same engine as *Killzone 3* and utilizing a familiar first-person, dual-analog approach, *Mercenary* looks and feels much like a traditional franchise entry, albeit with new touchscreen swipe commands that let us stab and disarm enemies with a quick motion. While some series diehards might have hoped for a sequel to the PSP's *Killzone: Liberation*, Vita is certainly primed to handle this slick new FPS entry.

▼ *Mercenary's* live-action-infused first trailer showed one possible mission type: rescuing a young boy from Helghast imprisonment.



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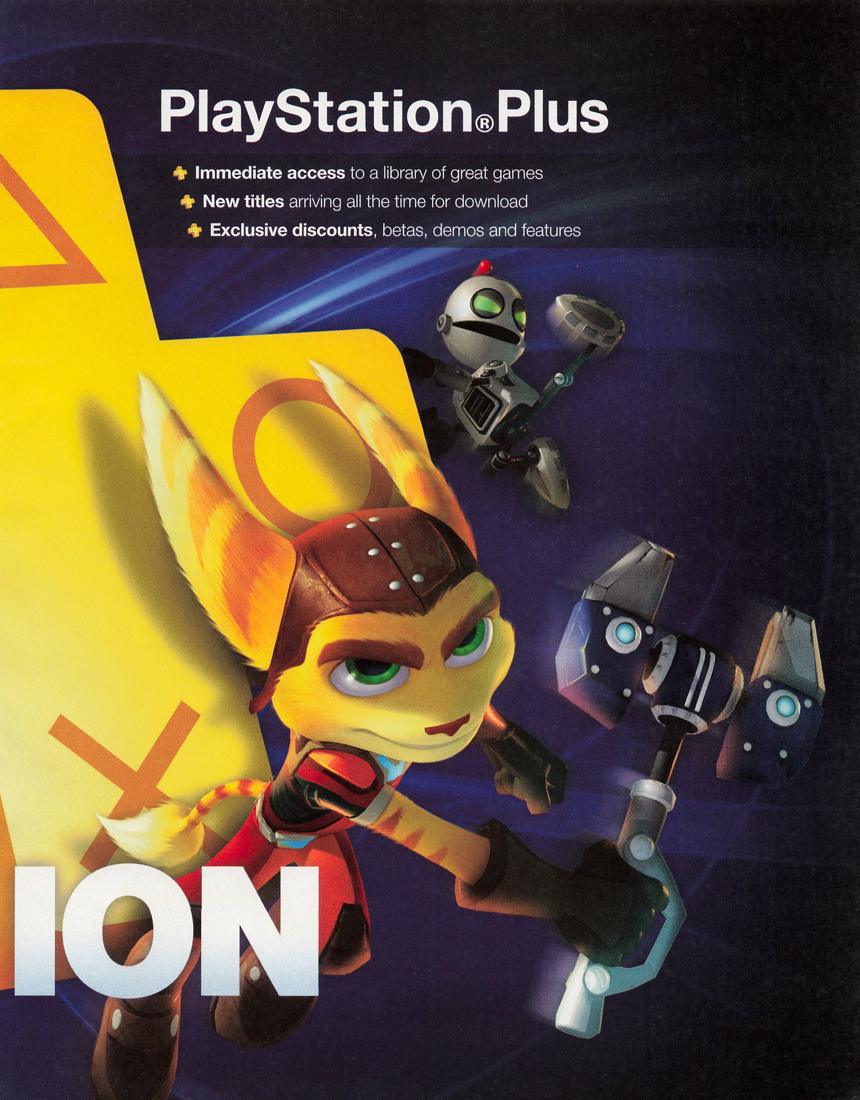
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Immediate access to a library of great games
New titles arriving all the time for download
Exclusive discounts, betas, demos and features
ION

5

"Sweating blood" for The Last of Us

Lead actors talk mo-cap and Joel's lack of morals

Fighting Fit
"Joel has impacted my life, on both a physical level and an emotional, cognitive level, too," Baker tells us. "Learning about Joel has taught me things about my life, even from a physical standpoint. Joel being this tough character made me want to change [myself], so I started going to the gym and training... I wanted to feel tougher, I wanted to be more of a survivor."

Naughty Dog's take on the end of days might be grittier, more moving and more teeth-jarringly vicious than anything seen on PlayStation before. At least, that's what the footage we've seen of *The Last of Us*—lots of shouting amid pipe swings and shotgun blasts—suggests. But acting out that violence within the comfort of a motion-capture studio must be pretty cushy by comparison, right? Hardly, says Troy Baker, the man who brings Joel to life: "There's not one person working on this game who hasn't lost sleep, who hasn't sweat blood over it."

Even if that statement's slightly embellished, it's still indicative of how hard Naughty Dog is striving to redefine itself as not just a producer of pixel-perfect jumpalongs with affable characters, but as a groundbreaker, willing to push moral boundaries as well as technical ones. The traditional hero character died with all the others in this world, and Gamescom revealed Joel's been on "both sides" of the struggle, as much the aggressor as the protector.

Dark Matter

One line from the character's bio stuck with the actor and sold the protagonist to him immediately: "Joel has no moral line left to cross."

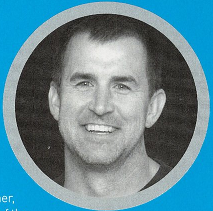
"That's such a statement [to make] about anybody," explains Baker, "because the circumstances that predicate that being true about you have to be incredibly dire. What desperate situations must you have been in to not only give up on humanity but also yourself, that you're willing to do anything?"

"Some of the stuff we captured was very intense," says Ashley Johnson, the woman behind the Ellen Page doppelganger and pint-sized survivor Ellie. "I mean, to the point where a week later, I'd still be in a bad mood and in a wreck. But it's all been for a purpose...it's not just there to make a statement, there are good reasons for why these scenes are in there."

The latter half of that statement surely nods toward the negative attention the game received following its particularly, er, *crimson* E3 showing. And as Johnson reminds us, *The Last of Us* is a story. Naughty Dog is a master of narrative, and for now, we have to trust that the precluding events to those snippets of violence provide their all-important context.

6

War Stories



EA Executive producer Greg Goodrich on *Medal of Honor: Warfighter's* origin and objectives

What's the experience like working on *Warfighter* with the Tier One guys as the writers? Did the story come fully formed out of their minds?

No, originally it was a vent book. It was a little, red spiral notebook that they had in their gear bag. They were overseas and it was an interesting time as far as getting the green light to go do things. They would often get frustrated and use the vent book to write down their frustrations to keep that negativity out of the room. Then it became this creative process, and they turned it into a positive thing where they would talk about the best traits of different guys, of leadership, and the people they looked up to as young operators. That creative process turned into a story that turned into a manuscript that was given to me years ago—2006, before I was even at EA. It was very different than what it is now, but the core is still very much intact. It still has that brotherhood, that spirit and reverence for the team.

Originally, it wasn't even going to be a *MOH* game but we took the best parts of *Warfighter* and the best parts of *Medal of Honor*—and some of that manuscript even made it into *Medal of Honor* 2010.

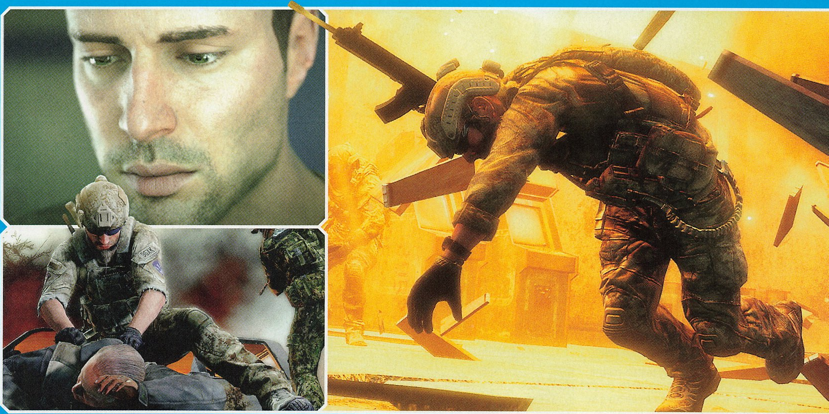
How did that decision come about to merge *Warfighter* with *Medal of Honor*?

When I got to EA, I was working with a small group of individuals to build *Warfighter* as a new IP. *Medal of Honor* was a long-running franchise, and the two projects just intersected with the themes we were exploring. Tier One operators Mother, Preacher, and Voodoo were all part of the original manuscript and were cast for AFO Neptune in the 2010 game. It was sort of a lead-in and setup for who these guys were, what this community was about, and their mindset.

Do you think there should always be a tie to realism rather than just pure fantasy in war games?

Not realism. We never say realism. We say authenticity. The locations, the types of enemies, the storylines, and the character traits of individuals should be authentic. There's nothing real about a videogame. Combat is combat. Games are games. But for the most part, we try to put the gamer in a situation where they say, "Yeah, this could have happened." It's historical fiction. It's not a true story. It's a fictional story woven through historical events.

> "Not realism. We never say realism. We say authenticity."



Perfect Legend

We are fighters. **Each of us brought together in our**

sWooZie

Kayane

Gem

I'm a fighter

Vanessa

Chosen

Yuta

Kasumi
sWooZie
Emperor Cow
Chosen1
Kayane
Rabies
Tom
Black Mamba
Ayane
Yuta
Gem
Mochi-A

Join the fight and learn more about our DOA fighters.

Master

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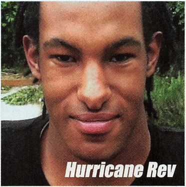
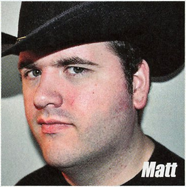
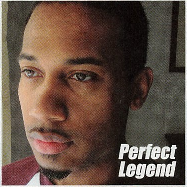
quest for victory and the journey to redefine ourselves.

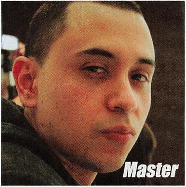

Hurricane Rev


Matt

Hayashi


Perfect Legend

I'm a Fighter


Master

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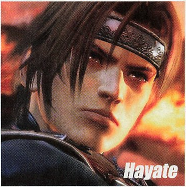
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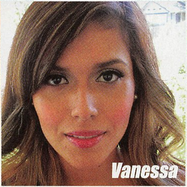
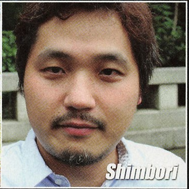

Vanessa


Shimbori

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DEAD OR ALIVE® 5

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7 Sound Investments

Two new premium wireless headsets look to raise the PlayStation audio standard

PlayStation PULSE
Wireless Stereo Headset

$150 store.sony.com

The PULSE wireless headset boasts a pleasing range of form and feature enhancements over last year's well-received PS3 wireless headset. Most noticeable is the unit's sleeker, more comfortable design that features a hidden noise-cancelling microphone instead of the earlier model's clunky retractable mic. Material quality has improved all around so the PULSE definitely feels like a high-end product. The headset also comes packed with features like virtual 7.1 surround sound, BassImpact technology (that lets us "feel the sound" via pulses through the ear pads), and pre-set audio modes that are announced as we cycle through them. The overall sound quality can be characterized as above average but slightly tinny, and not as fully robust as the higher-priced Astro Gaming A50. But considering the headset's PS3-friendly setup and integration features, its PS Vita compatibility (with the included 3.5mm cable), and its all-around performance, PULSE makes a strong argument for saving a cool $150.

WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET

The controls are, amazingly, all packaged into two thin rings along the ear cups, but manipulating the sliders and button can be tricky.

The flexible boom mic isn't removable, but flipping it up quickly and easily mutes the sound.

Astro Gaming A50
Wireless Headset

$300 astrogaming.com

There are a number of worthy competitors to Astro Gaming headsets and yet, they consistently appear at the top of our personal lust-have list. Much like Apple, AG just seems to produce products with an extra emphasis on quality, clever design, and thoroughly considered function. Following the form factor of the company's tournament-grade A40 wired headset (which will continue to be produced), the A50's most impressive feature is its integration of the previously separate MixAmp component that allows for balancing the game/voice feed by simply touching the right ear cup. Like the PULSE, the A50 sports virtual 7.1 surround sound, but its 40mm drivers can be pushed louder and deliver fuller, more dynamic audio across the entire sound spectrum. The unit's higher frequency 5.8GHz wireless connection also means more range and less likelihood of interference. Yes, the A50 may be pricey, but if you have the means, we highly recommend picking one up.

8 Silent Hell

Universal brings survival horror to life

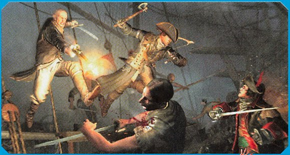
Aren't theme parks meant to be fun? Y'know, joy, laughter and the occasional vomit after too many hot dogs and rollercoaster rides? Well, beginning September 21, Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal Studios Orlando are taking *Silent Hill* from the fiction to nonfiction category in a themed house of horror. "For the first time, we're tackling a videogame," enthused Jim Timon, senior vice president of entertainment at Universal Orlando. "*Silent Hill* comes to life in terrifying form." Having always been reassured by the screen between the fog and our trembling hands, we don't share quite the same enthusiasm for the idea of facing our nightmares *in the dark.*

With 3D sequel *Silent Hill: Revelation* arriving in theaters at the end of October, now seems a sensible/horrifying time for Universal to work its movie-style magic. "We are thrilled with this partnership," explains Universal Studios Hollywood creative director John Murdy. "We have the whole world of *Silent Hill*... Fog World, Other World, Pyramid Head, the Nurses! All of the incredible [elements] that *Silent Hill* fans love." "Love" is a strong word to describe the way most gamers feel about the twisted town, but experiencing it in real life does have a kind of masochistic appeal. So yes, you go first... we'll be right behind you. Screaming.

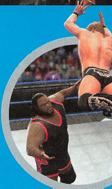
Relax, *Silent Hill* fans: these photos are from previous HHN events. Rest assured *this* year's will be far truer to canon.

9 The Readers' Most Wanted

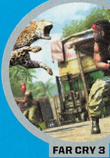
Surprise! *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* is still at the number one spot, with *Assassin's Creed III* nipping at its heels. *The Last of Us* is shockingly missing, while *The Last Guardian* has popped back up, despite no new information regarding its release. Our guess is the (false) rumors surrounding its cancellation spurred renewed interest in the long-delayed title. Elsewhere, several huge game releases have left room on the list for old friends like *Rainbow 6: Patriots* to make their comeback after months of absence.



01 *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*
02 *Assassin's Creed III*
03 *God of War: Ascension*
04 *Grand Theft Auto V*
05 *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*
06 *Monster Hunter Freedom 3*
07 *NBA Live 13*
08 *BioShock Infinite*
09 *PlayStation All-Stars: Battle Royale*
10 *WWE '13*
11 *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*
12 *Hitman: Absolution*
13 *Virtua Fighter 5*
14 *The Last Guardian*
15 *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time*
16 *Star Wars 1313*
17 *Crysis 3*
18 *Far Cry 3*
19 *Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6: Patriots*
20 *South Park: The Stick of Truth*



WWE '13



FAR CRY 3

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling data was tabulated on August 13, 2012.

We fight for equality and justice for all. Why not in MP too?

10 Should online multiplayer ditch XP and Unlocks?

Are the incentives meant to keep us playing actually ruining multiplayer?

Yes
Says the Sultan of Skill
Roger Burchill

I love the phrase "Peace through superior firepower," at least in the real world. I'm all for our brave armed forces using every advantage to accomplish missions with as little fuss and muss as possible. But that's the last thing I want in a game.

In a game, I want a level playing field, I want to develop my skill, I want to constantly be challenged by worthy competitors—and I don't want shortcuts. But that's the fundamental flaw of today's multiplayer: the more you play, the more you're rewarded with equipment and perks. It's great if online gaming is your life and you're prestige level 2,483 and you enjoy destroying noobs and kicking tied-up puppies, but shouldn't heavy users be able to kick ass *anyway*?

No, XP and Unlock bonuses are like tax breaks for the rich—another leg-up for those who least need it. But it comes at the cost of insuring that drop-in dabblers and noobs have little chance of finding the true intricacies and appeal of multiplayer. They're too busy dying and waiting to respawn to actually play—a sure way to cut off the blood flow to a burgeoning online community.

Here's a thought: why not make it so that everyone starts out loaded to the gills with the best weapons and perks? Then, the more someone plays, the weaker their firepower and abilities become. Top the leaderboard like *that* and I'll be impressed.

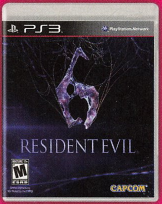
No
Says the Perk Princess
Anne Lewis

I don't always play online multiplayer, but when I do, I had better be getting perks. My generation is conditioned to need incentives to keep playing something, which is why the experience system in most multiplayer games is as popular as it is. I want to be rewarded for doing well, and if that means my perks can seriously kick your perks' collective asses, then so be it. I have a wildly competitive personality, and progression is an addiction I love to feed.

True, joining a game at a low level when all the other people in the match are pushing 50 or 60 can be daunting. Maybe you should stick to games that place you in matches with people of a similar skill level. Having some light at the end of the tunnel is what keeps games like *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* so darn popular. What would be the point if at the end of a match all you got was a pat on the back? I want the biggest guns and the best perks the game has.

I can understand wanting to consistently be on a level playing field, but where's the fun in that? Experience and new equipment are there to encourage players to keep playing and get better. Publishers love it because it means more people will be playing for a longer period of time, and as a consumer I love it because it's fun to shout obscenities at strangers when my .44 Magnum blows their faces off.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
SWEEPSTAKES



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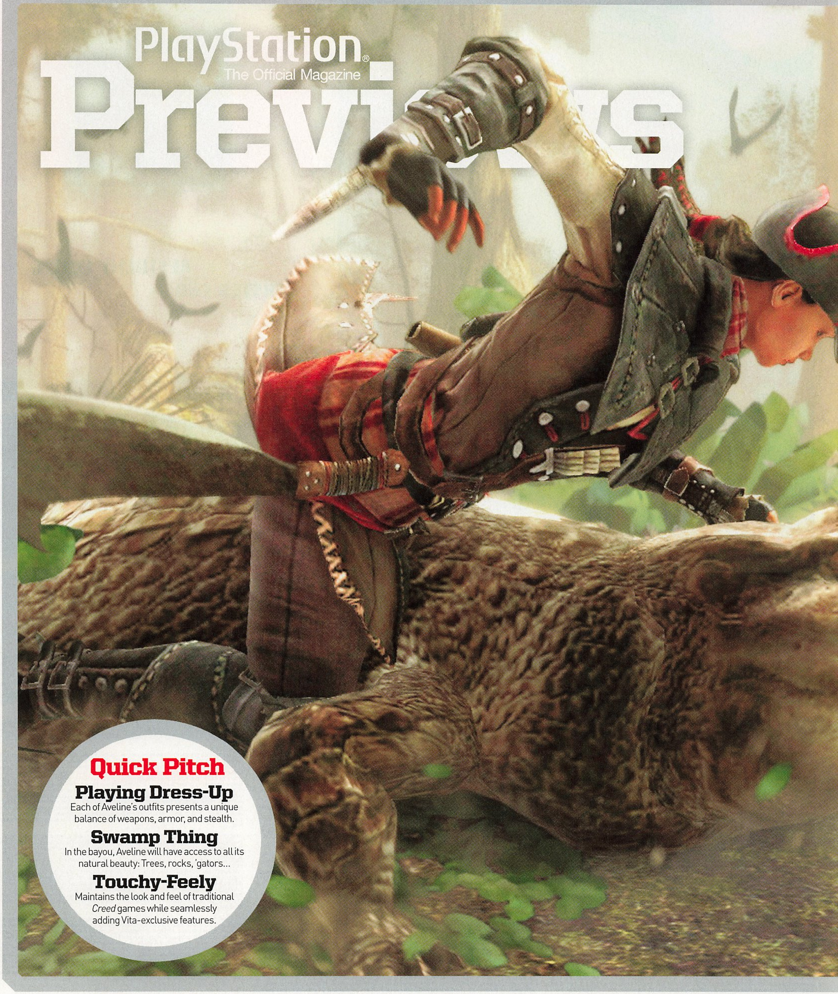


Quick Pitch

Playing Dress-Up

Each of Aveline's outfits presents a unique balance of weapons, armor, and stealth.

Swamp Thing

In the bayou, Aveline will have access to all its natural beauty: Trees, rocks, 'gators...

Touchy-Feely

Maintains the look and feel of traditional *Creed* games while seamlessly adding Vita-exclusive features.

HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **October** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Sofia**

Assassin's Creed III Liberation

Death comes in all guises

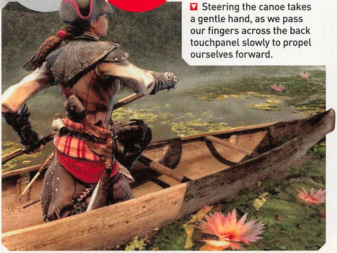
The bayou is beautiful, deadly, and one of *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation's* key settings. Our first taste of *Liberation's* gameplay unfolds in the alligator-infested swamplands, where a female smuggler begrudgingly asks heroine Aveline to kill an enemy (identified only as "an acolyte") and his followers, who are hiding among the trees. We follow her in a canoe, but between our initial struggle with the boat controls (which involve slow swipes across the rear touchpad) and our overwhelming desire to ogle the swamp's splendor, the trip is slow going.

Shoring on top of an alligator nest prompts a badass display of skills, as Aveline faces the beast in a flashy quick-time event. Taking to the trees for the rest of the hunt is an absolute (gator-free) joy; each leap and swing is intuitive and simple, requiring only minimal direction to drive Aveline down an expedient path. When we finally arrive at the acolyte's camp, we go for an all-out attack to see how *Liberation* handles up-front action. Despite having two fewer shoulder buttons than we're used to, countering and executions flow as smoothly as any other game in the series. The trip through the swamp ends in bloody satisfaction when the acolyte goes down with our sword in his belly, and a letter from his master falls into our possession.

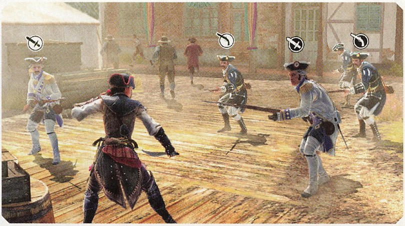
Who Are You?

Our second crack at the game takes us away from the bayou and deposits us back on familiar rooftops. Here, we're given a simple objective: Infiltrate a fort and eliminate a corrupt recruiter, while remaining undetected. It's a mission we've seen countless times, but *Liberation's* new costume-change mechanic presents us with new solutions to our problems.

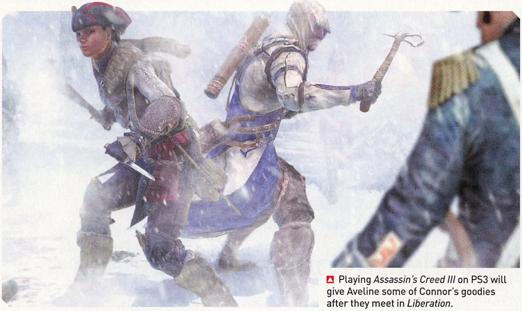
Each outfit provides Aveline with ▸▸



▼ Steering the canoe takes a gentle hand, as we pass our fingers across the back touchpanel slowly to propel ourselves forward.



▲ Similar to the Mark and Execute mechanic in *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, we can use the touchscreen to mark targets for rapid chain kills.



▲ Playing *Assassin's Creed III* on PS3 will give Aveline some of Connor's goodies after they meet in *Liberation*.

a new persona to slip into. Our first run at the mission is in our standard Assassin's garb—the most heavily armored of Aveline's getups, but also the most recognizable. We're used to this; we know exactly what to expect and have a straightforward plan. Sticking to rooftops, we drop guards quietly with Aveline's blowpipe. We use Eagle Vision to spot our victim as we creep across the rooftops, and leap on his unsuspecting back, Hidden Blades first.

Stepping into a dressing room—purchased throughout the city like shops in previous titles—we don Aveline's high-society outfit for our second attempt. With the aristocratic dress, we trade armor and weaponry for a charming new personality that requires more improvisation than the usual attire. Rather than dart above our enemies' heads (an impossibility in such an ensemble), we bribe our way past the guards at the gate and stroll into the fort unquestioned. A little flirting has a guard following us like a lovesick puppy, creating the illusion we're there with an escort and reducing suspicion. When our would-be paramour becomes a nuisance, we dispose of him and move on, keeping our target in sight. Most of Aveline's weapons are unavailable when she's in a dress, but she still possesses her hidden blades, and her blowpipe is now cleverly disguised as a classy lady's parasol. The mark hardly notices as we daintily lift our weapon and drop him from a distance. We're spotted looting his body, but a quick outfit change drops our notoriety back down, and soon people stop looking for us.

Our final guise offers a healthy balance between stealth and weaponry, lacking only Aveline's sword and pistol. Aveline's servant clothes are more noticeable than her dress, but she can climb now, giving her an escape route should she need it. We sneak into the fort carrying an abandoned crate; to the guards, we're just a servant delivering goods. Inside the walls, we ditch the crate, head into side passages, and take the long way to our target. Each time a guard approaches, we grab a broom and blend in with a group of workers; as a woman sweeping the walkways, we're practically invisible. As the target passes, we introduce our machete to his neck and disappear into the resulting chaos.

ANNE LEWIS

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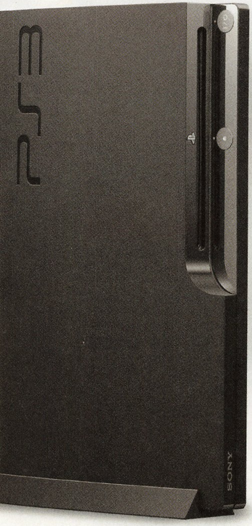

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Quick Pitch

Xenophobia-free

Player-versus-player in *Defiance* lets us blast enemies as human or alien super-soldiers.

Mix and Match

Gear carries over between PvP and PvE, and we can create custom weapon loadouts.

Tip the Scales

Battles range from six-on-six shootouts to chaotic 32-player warzones.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **April 2013** Pub **Trion Worlds** Dev **Trion Worlds**

Defiance

Floats like an MMO, stings like a shooter

Death by Incubator. That's just one of the many ways to kill or be killed in shooter/MMO hybrid *Defiance*. We knew how *Defiance's* player-versus-environment content would tie in with the Syfy show of the same name, but no self-respecting MMO would be complete without the yin to the PvE's yang: player-versus-player skirmishes. We strapped on some body armor and hopped into the fray of *Defiance's* PvP without preconceptions—and were surprised to find that it plays like an honest-to-God third-person shooter, with the addictive gear-collecting, class-designing trappings of an MMO.

At first glance, *Defiance* PvP resembles *Starhawk's* multiplayer—but unlike *Starhawk's* massive levels and vehicle-centric play, this battlefield (known as a Conflict map) was a much more manageable six-on-six team deathmatch. That's not to say that every shootout is this up-close and personal: Trion is working on 32-person conflicts, complete with multi-man vehicles and sprawling expanses of terrain. We may have been confined to an alien-growth-infested harbor for this Conflict match, but there'll also be plenty of opt-in PvP in the overworld, so we can join the fray if we spot a firefight in the distance.

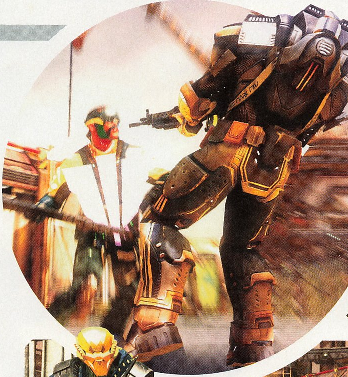
Shooters and MMO gameplay don't often gel well together. We don't want to lock onto a target, watch a canned firing animation, then pray that our invisible die-roll garnered a hit. But *Defiance* gets it right: This feels like bona fide run-and-gun, where weapons actually fire when we pull the trigger and bullets pierce flesh with the same ferocity as in an FPS. "The moment-to-moment [gameplay] is totally skill-based," says *Defiance* creative director Bill Trost. That means that our skills with a sidearm will outpace any level-grinding, loot-accumulating mercenary who can't hit the broad side of an extraterrestrial ark.

The hallmark of any satisfying shooter is a varied, potent arsenal, and *Defiance* delivers. The aforementioned Incubator was our personal favorite: This syringe-like gun fires off a volley of needles, each containing an alien infection. On contact with a player, these needles cause grotesque, brownish-yellow polyps to sprout from the victim's skin; picture a giant rotten egg with soldier legs. Better yet, if the poor host gets gunned down while they're infected, wretched crab-like creatures burst from the body, chasing down his allies with the speed of a skittering spider.

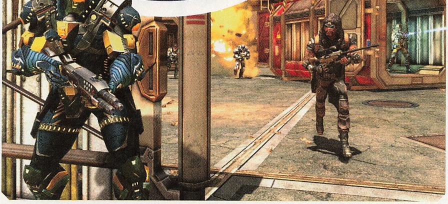
The usual weaponry is present as well (see sidebar), with gratifying ragdoll

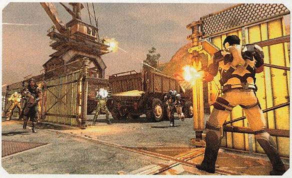
Balancing Act

Designing fairly powered weapons for an MMO sounds like an arduous process. But *Defiance's* creative lead, Bill Trost, put it in terms we could understand: The team designs weapons with two distinct player archetypes in mind. "We affectionately call them 'Action Andy' and 'Tactical Timmy,'" says Trost. "We're always [thinking]: How would Action Andy handle this situation? Which weapons would he choose? How would Tactical Timmy tackle it? We're trying to hit that sweet spot of balancing for those two play styles."



Defiance will reportedly boast thousands of weapons, all of which carry over between competitive and cooperative play.





Dockyards aren't the most spectacular environments, but *Defiance* is a big game, so there'll be plenty more arenas where this came from.

Skills with a sidearm will outpace any level-grinding loot-hoarder who can't hit the broad side of an alien ark.

physics that turn every point-blank shotgun blast or sniper-rifle headshot into morbid corpse comedy. More altruistic players will gravitate to the Bio-Magnetic Gun; this blue-beam-shooting cannon heals allies, but can be alt-fired to sear the flesh off of aggressors. Each kill, assist, and point capture gets added to our extensive stat-tracking, complete with goal-driven "Pursuits" that act as long-term super-achievements.

Best of all, the weapons and gear we earn during PvP skirmishes will carry over to the PvE portions of the game, and vice versa. Also, primary and secondary weapons can be mixed and matched, provided we've earned the guns in question; if we feel like playing a sniper/healer hybrid, we can. "There are no restrictions on any of the weapons and skills—it's just a matter of having the skill points to unlock them," says Trost. "You'll also be able to get unique loot and access to unique abilities [that will be exclusive to] PvP."

It wouldn't be an MMO without some abilities and skills—but the two we experienced were integrated nicely into the fast-paced gunplay. Blur boosted our combat capacity, granting super speed and bolstering our melee wallops. Holograms act as tricky decoys to divert enemy fire; with enough skill points invested, they'll even mimic our actions instead of running aimlessly.

And that was just the surface—we didn't even get to glimpse the playable alien soldiers, heat-seeking rocket launchers, or large-scale vehicular battlegrounds. We'd be eager for *Defiance* if it was just the PvP portion; to think that there's an entire MMO campaign backing it up has us eagerly awaiting this one. LUCAS SULLIVAN

Five weapons of choice for PvP matches

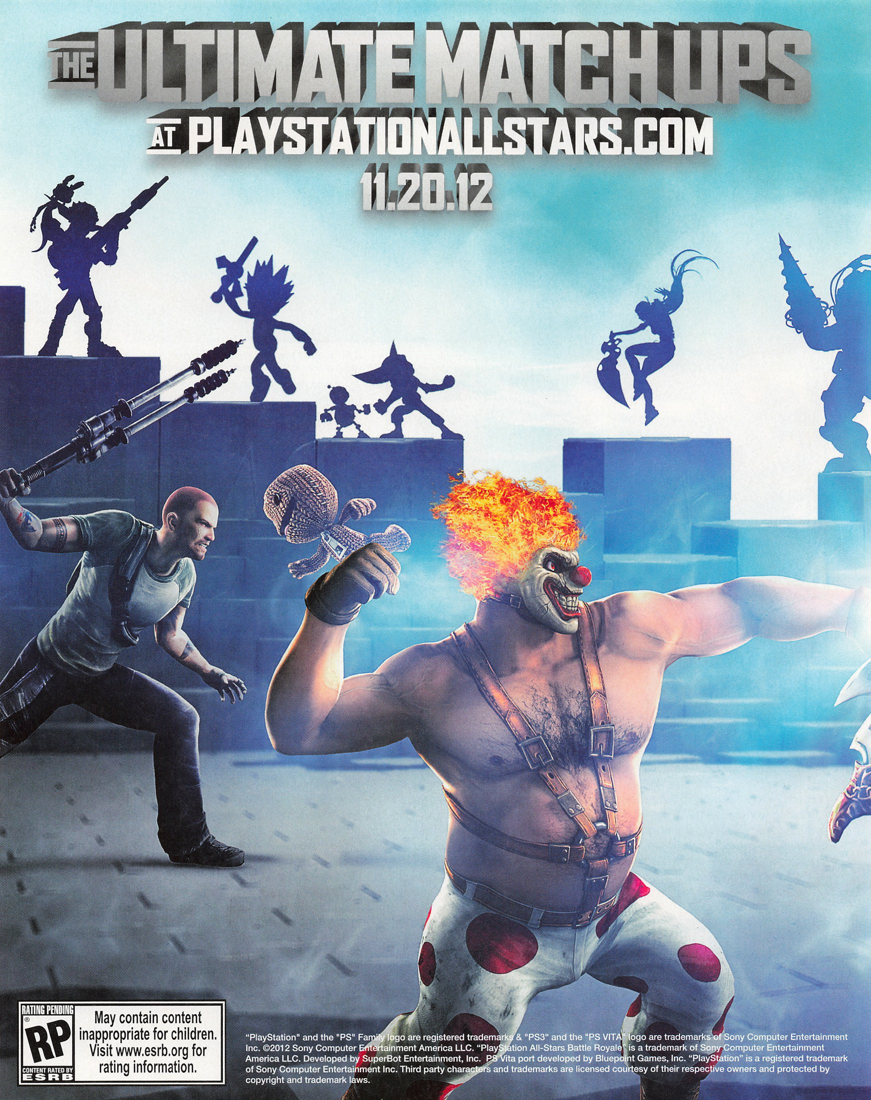
1 **Detonator**
Slap a grenade onto an enemy's back, then watch the meaty fireworks.

2 **Bio-Magnetic Gun**
Heal allies, then use its alt-fire to harm foes.

3 **Sniper Rifle**
It's not camping; it's just patiently waiting for the opportune moment.

4 **Shotgun**
Shreds through flesh and armor when fired from arm's length.

5 **Our bare hands**
Why waste ammo when a karate chop to the back of the neck will do?



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HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2013** Pub **Codemasters** Dev **Codemasters**

GRID 2

Rewinding the clock to bring us the racer of the future

The rough-and-ready suspension physics from *Dirt 3*. The aerodynamics and tire/surface interaction from *F1 2012*. The speed and flair for the dramatic from the original *GRID*. Like a rich-boy racer with a shiny new car to mod, Codemasters is assembling its next big racing hopeful by plucking only the most powerful custom parts from the shelf. If that makes *GRID 2* sound like a Frankengame, then rest assured that if what we found out during a recent hands-on session is anything to go by, it's been put together so slickly that we can't even see the stitches.

On the contrary, this is one of the prettier racers out there by far—even when it's taking in the relatively uninspiring sights of downtown Chicago. Rays of light, both natural and man-made, bounce from skyscraper to skyscraper and onto the roof of our car as it screams past the forest of soaring towers, using a similar advanced lighting technique to the one seen in *Battlefield 3*. The reflections form a convincing shimmer effect that leaves our car looking as though it firmly belongs in the world it inhabits—a trick many racing games still struggle with.

Although the dynamic lighting we were shown is pretty impressive, it's impossible to estimate how much of it will trickle down onto consoles, since the version that we played was running on a high-end PC. Still, we've seen enough to know that *GRID 2* has the horsepower to compete head-to-head with *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* for looks, and *Gran Turismo 5* for racing smarts.

The CPU driver A.I. in particular catches the eye; each opponent is individualized with up to 60 special attributes, ranging from reactive speed to cornering ability, in turn leading to organic races in which each CPU driver adapts their driving style both to play to their strengths and in response to our behavior.

Additionally, Codemasters promises *GRID 2* will "reinvent" Flashback, the feature *GRID* pioneered, but wouldn't say exactly how—and the feature was disabled during our testing session. At least having to live with our collisions gave us an opportunity to check out the game's remarkable car-deformation physics. **JAMES COATES**

Dev Talk

"We don't have a fixed number of cars in the game at the moment, but we're clearly trying to pile as much content into the game as we can. We've got a little bit more time to get more stuff in."

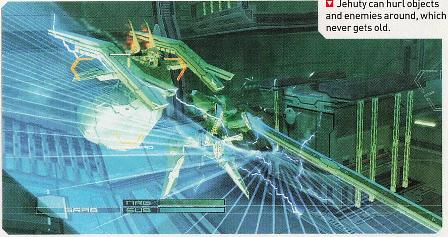
Clive Moody, Executive Producer, Codemasters

WRL
MUSTANG

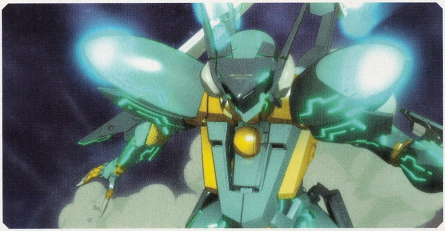
Not pictured: car noises. But make no mistake, this is a LOUD game.

GRID 2
GRID 2
WRL

As our profile rises, more and more fans will start turning up at events to cheer us on.



Jehuty can hurl objects and enemies around, which never gets old.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Konami** Dev **Kojima Productions/High Voltage**

Zone of the Enders

HD Collection

Jehuty returns to active duty

Back in 2001 (just a few months before messing with our heads in *Metal Gear Solid 2*), Hideo Kojima created *Zone of the Enders*, a mech-combat game that's still unlike anything else on the market. Hyper-stylish and packing a far more human narrative than most games about giant robots, it offered up blisteringly fast, *Dragon Ball Z*-esque aerial battles that let us wreck hordes of foes with laser blasts and energy-sword combos.

The formula holds up nicely in *Zone of the Enders HD Collection*, which brings ZoE together with its more dazzling 2003 sequel, *The 2nd Runner*. In the first, a young, killing-averse boy named Leo stumbles into the cockpit of a powerful mecha called Jehuty while his space colony is under siege. The considerably improved *2nd Runner*, meanwhile, centers on a space miner named Dingo, who also comes across Jehuty in a moment of desperate need.

Both games still look amazing in motion, and the widescreen HD overhaul makes their anime-inspired visuals pop like they never could a decade ago. Even the cutscenes have gotten a touch-up—although sadly, no amount of remastering could help the first game's shockingly dated 3D cutscenes. Otherwise, little has been tampered with, and given that *ZoE's* formula was never really imitated or improved on, it still feels surprisingly fresh. And if Trophy support and slicker visuals aren't enough to lure us back to these underappreciated classics, then the included *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* demo should sweeten the deal. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Activision** Dev **Toys for Bob**

Skylanders Giants

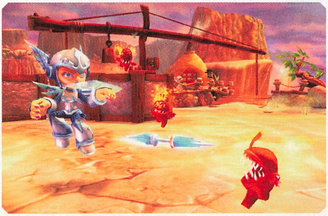
Getting bigger, in more ways than one

We already know the *"Giants"* in the name refers to new and bigger characters, and that's not the only thing being added to this action- and puzzle-packed sequel. A cartoony, third-person dungeon crawler, *Skylanders Giants* distinguishes itself by giving us multiple characters—each with unique attacks—that can be switched at any time by placing our respective toys on the wireless Portal of Power platform.

Characters are also aligned with eight different elements, as are different areas of the game's levels, which makes picking the right creature for the job especially important. When going into an icy area, for instance, it makes sense to switch from the eagle-looking, air-based character Jet-Vac to Chill, a plucky female ice warrior whose attacks draw an added boost from the surroundings.

Along with the titular Giants and new regular-sized Skylanders, eight LightCore characters (which light up when near the Portal) are joining the lineup, four of which are new. Every Skylander now also has nine Trophy-like challenges—one of which is unique to that specific character—and by completing any three, we earn a bronze, silver, and then gold top hat that greatly improves our stats.

We can also earn cash in the new battle arenas, where Skylanders fight waves of enemies, or by playing Sky Stones, a War-like battle card game. Clearly, it's not just the new Skylanders themselves that are going gigantic in this game. **PAUL SEMEL**



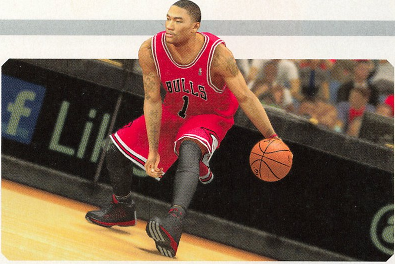
▲ "Cool" new character Chill throws icicles with deadly skill.

▲ In deference to *Skylanders'* older fans, *Giants* now has four difficultly levels, including the unlockable "Nightmare."

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **2K Sports** Dev **Visual Concepts**

NBA 2K13

Closing in on a three-peat



Sorry defenders, with dribbling mapped to the Right-analog stick, emulating Derrick Rose's ankle-busting drives is a snap.

If there's anything approaching a sports-game dynasty these days, it's the *NBA 2K* series. *2K11* set a new standard for basketball games, *2K12's* fine-tuning and feature expansion made it an instant classic, and while incremental changes might have proved perfectly adequate for *NBA 2K13*, a new control mechanic promises to revolutionize gameplay once again.

Simply referred to as the Control Stick, the new system merges two functions in the Right-analog stick: dribbling and shooting. Maneuvering the ball handler around the floor is still accomplished via the Left stick, but Right-stick dribbling allows us to intuitively execute an amazing array of dribble moves, including crossovers and spins. Press L2, and Right-stick control immediately transitions from dribbling to shooting mode. Why fuse two seemingly vital and complex functions to one stick? "Because it gave us access to every move we wanted in both areas," says 2K13's gameplay producer Rob Jones, "And as you get used to it, you start finding how dynamic it really makes the game feel."

It's a design premise that was certainly evident during our hands-on session, as the one-on-one isolation play that dominates the real-world NBA came to the forefront in our game experience. Controlling a high-skill player like OKC Thunder's Russell Westbrook as he penetrated and broke down the defense communicated the speed and fluidity of the sport like never before. With moves like these, we can finally understand—and forgive—his showboating.

ROGER BURCHILL

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Graeme Boyd, Xbox

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Arenas blend disparate inspirations, like *LittleBigPlanet* and *Buzz!*

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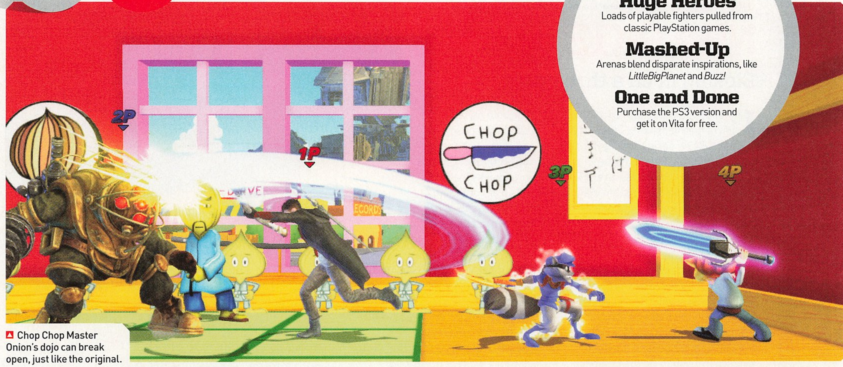


Chop Chop Master Onion's dojo can break open, just like the original.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3/PS Vita** ETA **November** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SuperBot Entertainment**

PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale

Even more mayhem...and time to make it all work

Sony's fanservice fighting mashup seems to get bigger and bolder with each passing announcement, as the publisher recently confirmed even more familiar faces for the four-player brawler. Joining the already-bulging roster—which includes action stars like Nathan Drake from *Uncharted* and the Big Daddy from *BioShock*, as well as colorful favorites like Sly Cooper and Jak and Daxter—are four new combatants: Sackboy from *LittleBigPlanet*, Spike from *Ape Escape*, Dante from *DmC: Devil May Cry*, and Ratchet and Clank, who fight as one.

Each aims to bring its own unique style and approach to *PlayStation All-Stars: Battle Royale*, from Ratchet's hilarious firearms and gadgets (including grumbly Mr. Zurkon) to the violent hack-and-slash antics of the newly stylized Dante. And they'll have another stunning arena to duke it out on, as Sony also revealed the inclusion of Stowaways, an airborne stage that blends the death-defying cargo-plane sequence from *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* with things from *BioShock Infinite* (including the monstrous Songbird).

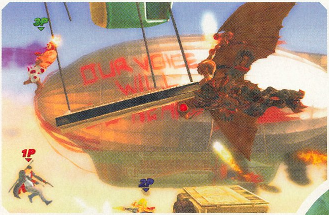
Also, PlayStation fans who wish to play on both PS3 and Vita won't need to shell out twice for similar experiences. Buying the PS3 version (disc or digital) grants free access to the latter, and each supports cross-play for dizzying multi-platform battles. We'll have to wait a bit longer to play, however, as the game's been pushed back to a late November release, with the one-month delay intended to give developer SuperBot time to further polish the game and incorporate beta-test feedback—probably a good idea, based on our recent hands-on.

We spun through numerous online matches using the few characters provided in the beta, like Fat Princess and PaRappa the Rapper, and some bright spots were immediately apparent. The fighters feel notably distinct in action, and the merging of disparate franchises looks fantastic, with lots of surprising attacks and cameos—like witnessing *Patapon* soldiers pop up amidst a hellish setting from *God of War*.

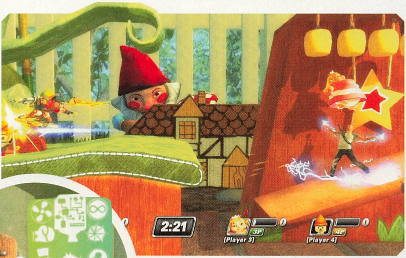
In this early state, however, it's easy to lose sight of our combatants amidst the massive environments, especially when the camera zooms out to show faraway fighters. And without any visible health bars, it's unclear why we perish at some times but not others (except for when we get knocked out by a flashy super move). It's tough to fight intelligently without such vital interface cues, and the result yet feels haphazard and muddled, even for a frantic arena brawler like this. But these seem like fixable issues, and there's still time to turn this immensely charming and promising collaboration into an experience worthy of the PlayStation lineage. **ANDREW HAYWARD**

Killian Move

Sony recently snatched up former Capcom Community Manager Seth Killian—who not coincidentally shares his name with *Street Fighter IV's* insane final boss—to be a lead game designer for Sony Santa Monica and help *Battle Royale* though its home stretch. His considerable expertise with fighters should be an invaluable boost.



BioShock Infinite's Songbird spices up the *Uncharted 3* stage.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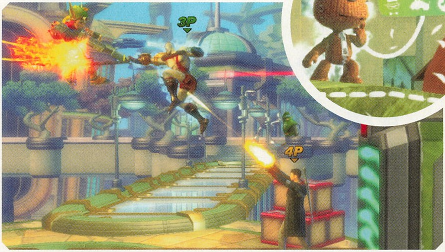
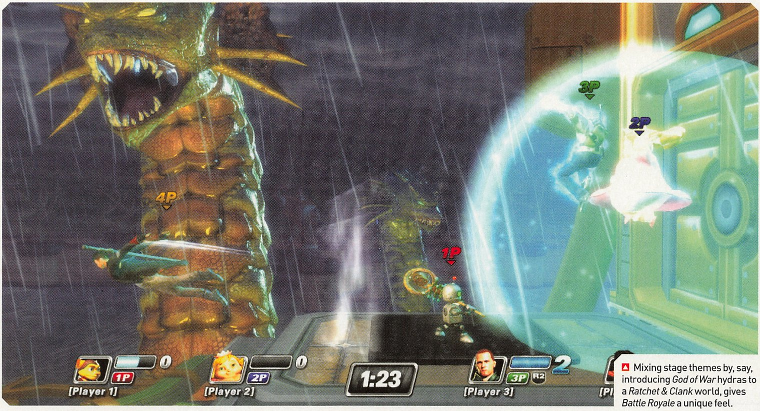
3P
[Player 3]
4P
[Player 4]

Lightning powers or morbid obesity: which one is deadlier?



Remember this lesson, Kratos: Turn your back on Dante, and he may introduce a bullet to your crotch.


3P
2P
4P
1P
0
1P
[Player 1]
0
2P
[Player 2]
1:23
2
3P
R2
[Player 3]

Mixing stage themes by, say, introducing *God of War* hydras to a *Ratchet & Clank* world, gives *Battle Royale* a unique feel.

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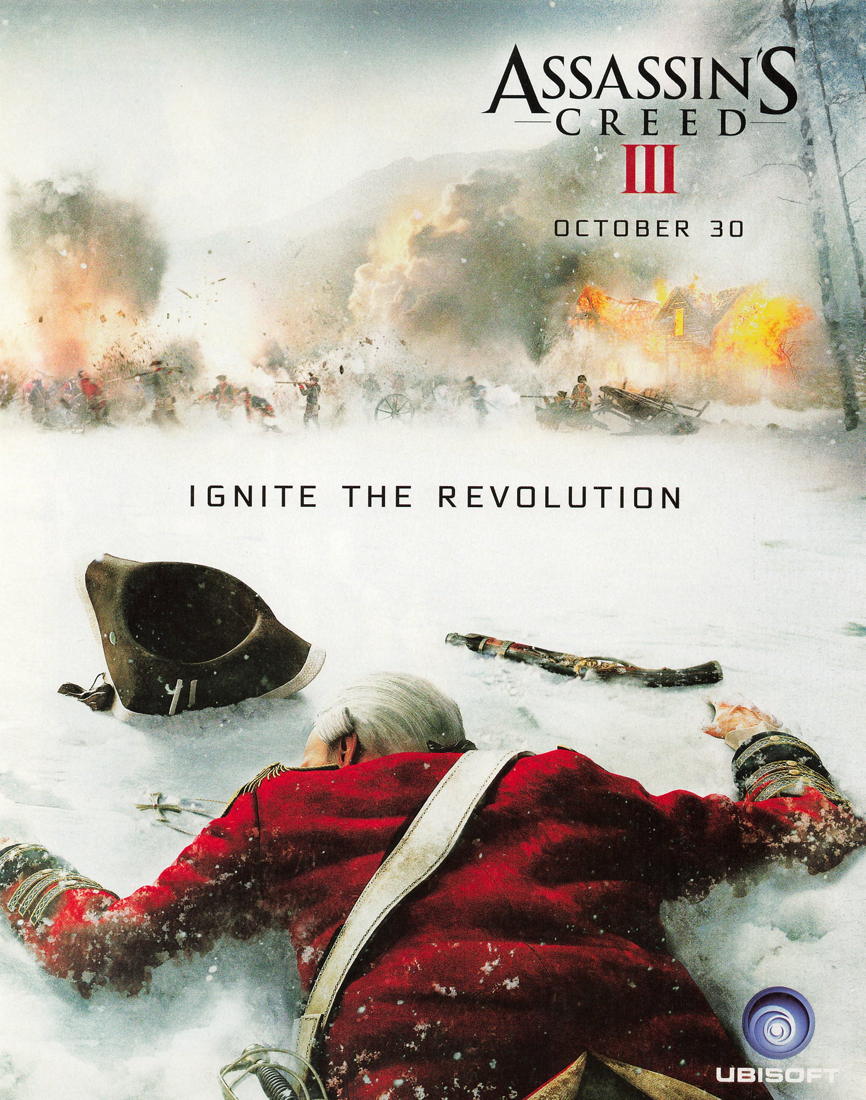
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HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2013** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Visceral Games**

Dead Space 3

Like a deep-space Chuck Greene

Isaac Clarke is a master of improvisation. His iconic arsenal of repurposed mining tools proves it. So in the eyes of the developers at Visceral Games, it only makes sense that he'd find a way to give himself a little extra firepower—like, say, build weapons from scratch. Isaac is an engineer, after all, so constructing custom firearms feels like a logical extension of the existing weapon-upgrade system. Just guide him to a workbench and, provided he's collected the necessary resources, craft a completely unique weapon that combines aspects of existing Dead Space weaponry with brand-new technology—like the bolas gun, which can immobilize enemy limbs.

We start by selecting a single- or double-handed frame that can support two different "engines" (like a chaingun, or a flamethrower) as well as an adapter for each that determines the firing pattern—from single, concentrated shots to fully automatic sprays. The result is essentially two guns in one, each mapped to a different trigger. An electrified bolt gun with an under-barrel ripper? No problem. A high-impact machine gun with a massive clip and a force gun underneath? Do it. Players can even add attachments and upgrades that modify the weapon's performance by, say, creating flaming bullets, or increasing reload speed.

While these powerful Frankenstein shooters may feel contrary to the series' survival-horror roots, our hands-on demo took us down a few classically claustrophobic corridors as well. Though the demo opened with a high-intensity flight through a field of space debris (which didn't require too much participation from us, but was fun nonetheless), it quickly settled into a series of darkened hallways crawling with Necromorphs. Everything about it felt truly *Dead Space*, from the telekinesis puzzles to the gory, horrifying death sequences…er, not that we *died*, or anything. That would be embarrassing. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

▲ While the developers adamantly insist he's still an engineer at heart, Isaac manages his fair share of heroics. It's different, but by no means bad.

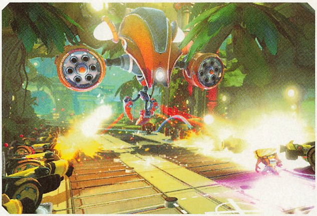
▲ Though Isaac can only carry two weapons, the new customization options allow for four distinct fire types. Put a flamethrower on that Plasma Cutter!

▲ Most of *Dead Space 3* takes place on an actual planet, but that doesn't mean the series' trademark zero-G sections have disappeared.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3/PS Vita** ETA **Q4** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Insomniac Games**

Ratchet & Clank Full Frontal Assault

The best offense is a good defense



▲ Some defensive emplacements are better suited to particular attacks. Mix and match for maximum effect.

Starring in their 11th game (fifth on PS3) in 10 years, *Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault* has the iconic PlayStation duo returning for what's pegged as old-school *R&C* gameplay with a tower-defense twist.

This latest adventure has our beloved heroes dropping in to cheer up a despondent Captain—and now former president—Qwark when they're rudely interrupted by a new species of marauding aliens called the Grungarians. Tasked with saving the galaxy again, Ratchet and Clank explore *Assault's* large, open battlefields to face off against the enemy and collect Bolts. Weapons customization is still a major component of gameplay and some classic *R&C* weapons will make return appearances. *R&C Future: A Crack in Time's* hover boots are also back to propel Ratchet around the battlefields.

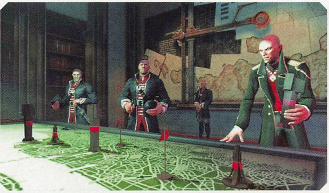
While *Assault's* overall experience seems quite familiar, its aliens don't just sit back, waiting to be destroyed. Expect periodic attacks on the duo's home base in every level. Setting up defenses like turrets, mines, and shields (purchased with Bolts) will keep the onslaught at bay initially, but Ratchet will need to enter the fray as the intensity of the attacks increase in order to keep the base's generators safe and secure.

Although pricing and release info has still not been finalized for this download-only title, *Assault* has been confirmed for Sony's Cross Buy program—which means purchase of the PS3 version of the game garners a free download of the Vita version. **ROGER BURCHILL**

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Bethesda Softworks** Dev **Arkane Studios**

Dishonored

Prison, plague rats, and supernatural powers



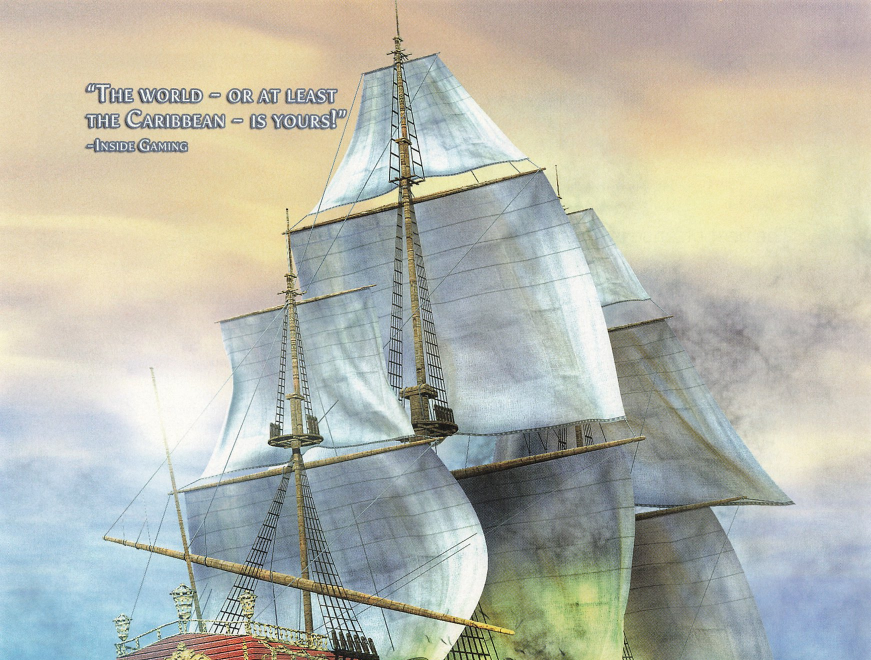
▲ *Dishonored's* unique steampunk civilization is a big part of its appeal.

Eventually, *Dishonored's* supernatural assassin will be able to possess clueless humans and conjure swarms of flesh-eating rodents—but before that, he faces a rough path, and it begins with his own imprisonment. Framed at the beginning of the game for the murder of Dunwall's empress—the very woman he'd sworn to protect—bodyguard-turned-badass Corvo Atano's imminent execution is stalled when he discovers a mysterious ally has left a key in his cell.

Using the gift, we escape Corvo's cage and stealthily explore the dingy stronghold. We find a blade and begin using it to liberate patrolling guards of their insides, leaving quite the corpse pile in our wake. Upon rigging an explosive to blast the prison's gate open, we find ourselves in the sewers. Avoiding plague-carrying rats, as well as the rotting human remains they're feasting on, we navigate the soggy, subterranean labyrinth. Another gift and a note soon reveal that our new friends, "The Loyalists," know how to craft a sweet crossbow.

Upon firing some bolts through our enemies' throats, we rendezvous with a boatman who takes us to the Loyalists' hideout. After meeting with the rebel group and their gadget-making vendor, we hit the sack; our sleep's interrupted, however, by the Outsider, a god-like chap who sears Corvo's hand with a tattoo.

The mysterious ink, it turns out, grants Corvo the gift to teleport short distances and unleash other forms of otherworldly hell. We look forward to doing just that—and picking up where this brief preview left off—extremely soon. **MATT CABRAL**



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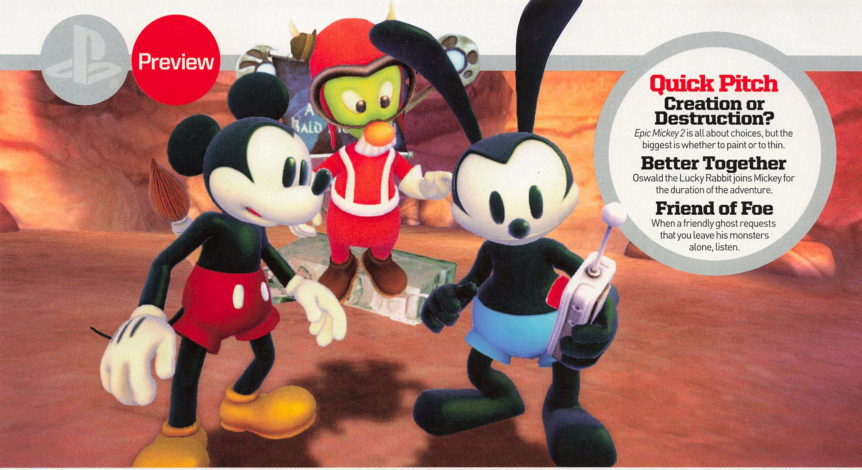


Quick Pitch

Creation or Destruction?
Epic Mickey 2 is all about choices, but the biggest is whether to paint or to thin.

Better Together
Oswald the Lucky Rabbit joins Mickey for the duration of the adventure.

Friend of Foe
When a friendly ghost requests that you leave his monsters alone, listen.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **November** Pub **Disney Interactive Studios** Dev **Junction Point Studios**

Disney Epic Mickey 2

The Power of Two

Paint by numbers—specifically, the number "2"

Dev Talk

"[Gamers aren't] paralyzed by choice anymore, but normal humans still are. When we saw that in the testing cycle, we backed down a little from choice and consequence in the first game. Players kind of get it now. We start hearing from them that they liked that. So in this game, choice and consequence are back in force."
Warren Spector
Project Lead

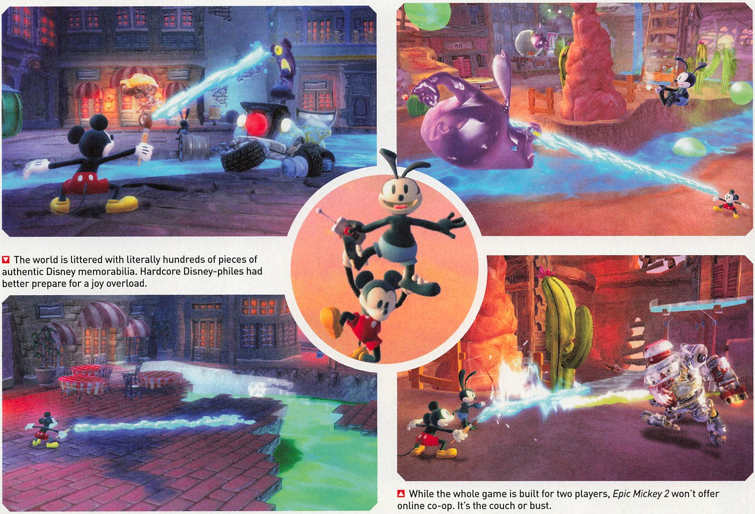
So what's it going to be: paint or thinner? Restore the environment and convert enemies into friendly pawns, or wreck the world and blot baddies out of existence? This, Disney fans, is the crux of *Disney Epic Mickey 2*. Wielding Mickey Mouse's magical brush (and sidekick Oswald's helpful shock device), players can tackle all of *Epic 2's* charming puzzles and whimsical platforming using either approach (or a mix of the two). Either way, we'll spend a great deal of time hosing down objects with simple point-and-shoot mechanics, but our choice of ammo can permanently alter a level's landscape and even affect which missions the heroic duo is offered.

During a hands-on demo set in the New Orleans Square-inspired Blot Alley—a ghetto of sorts where all the Splatters were placed after Mickey defeated the Mad Doctor in the first game—we were confronted with this duality very directly. Our friendly ghost guide, Ian, specifically requested that we not "puddle" (i.e. spray with thinner) any of the Splatters, as he was magnanimously trying to rehabilitate them. This left us with the following choice: stealth through the area using paint when necessary, or start spraying thinner and make a mad dash for the exit.

For the sake of science, we tried a little of both, and each option revealed different paths, rooms, and treasures along the way. Using thinner forced one Splatter to ring a panic bell, which of course led to an all-out ambush that included one Splatter spraying thinner out a window at us, melting much of the ground in the process. Needless to say, this would make backtracking for items later a whole lot trickier. Sticking with paint actually turned the strategically placed "ink wells" into invisibility ink that slowly wore off as we walked, but proved useful nonetheless.

Of course, Ian was none too happy about the whole melting-ground thing, so he harrumphed off into the ether—which, according to the devs, may come back to haunt us later in the game. Still, we learned a lot from our little experiment. For example, *Epic Mickey 2* revolves mainly around simple environment puzzles and exploration, but the combat can be frantic fun as well—so long as the Move controls decide to cooperate. We actually had an easier time on the DualShock, but using the Move wand as a paintbrush makes so much sense that we're willing to work with it.

We also discovered that musicals and videogames might not be such an odd mix. Just ask the Mad Doctor, who not only returns, but sings all of his lines as well. If nothing else, at least we can count on Disney to deliver a charming experience. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**



The world is littered with literally hundreds of pieces of authentic Disney memorabilia. Hardcore Disney-philes had better prepare for a joy overload.

While the whole game is built for two players, *Epic Mickey 2* won't offer online co-op. It's the couch or bust.

Though the original *Epic Mickey* was a Wii exclusive, this ain't no Wii port. The graphics look sharp, clean, and totally PS3-worthy.

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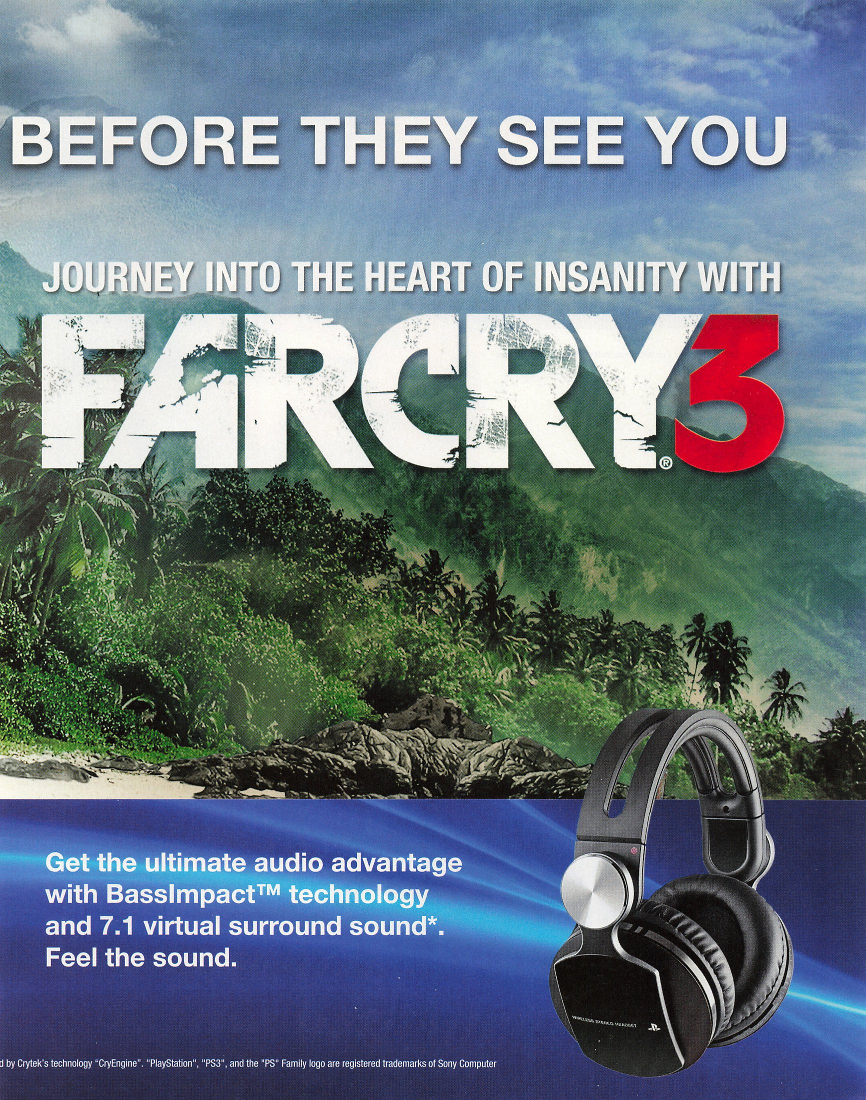

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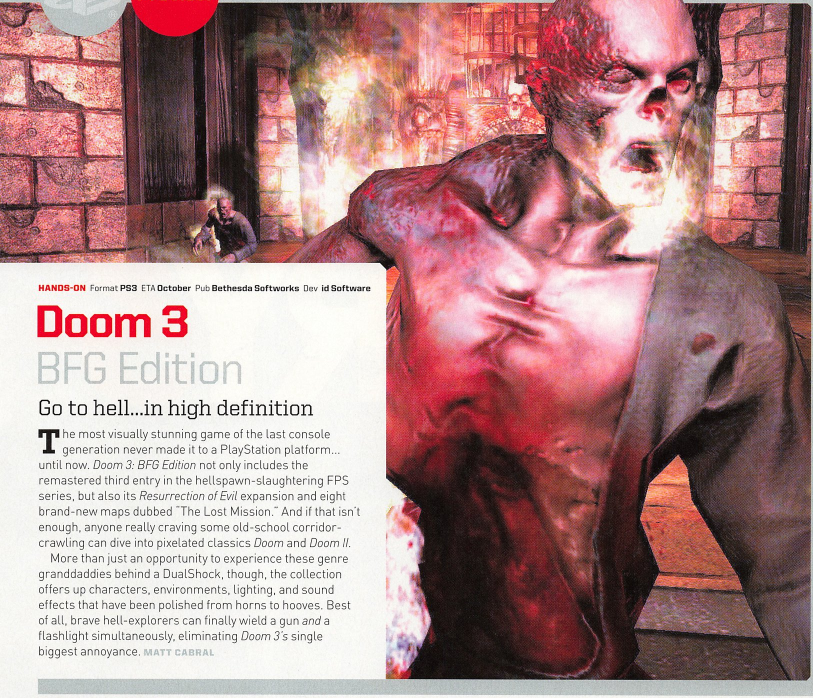

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Bethesda Softworks** Dev **id Software**

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BFG Edition

Go to hell...in high definition

The most visually stunning game of the last console generation never made it to a PlayStation platform... until now. *Doom 3: BFG Edition* not only includes the remastered third entry in the hellspawn-slaughtering FPS series, but also its *Resurrection of Evil* expansion and eight brand-new maps dubbed "The Lost Mission." And if that isn't enough, anyone really craving some old-school corridor-crawling can dive into pixelated classics *Doom* and *Doom II*.

More than just an opportunity to experience these genre granddaddies behind a DualShock, though, the collection offers up characters, environments, lighting, and sound effects that have been polished from horns to hooves. Best of all, brave hell-explorers can finally wield a gun *and* a flashlight simultaneously, eliminating *Doom 3's* single biggest annoyance. **MATT CABRAL**

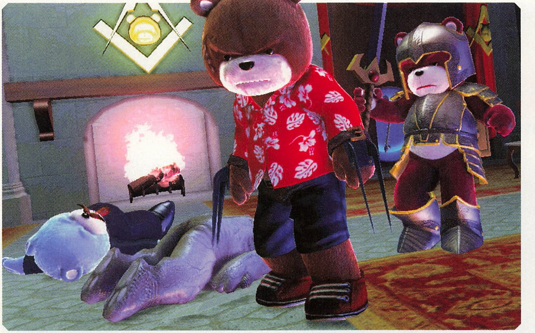
HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **October** Pub **DTP Entertainment** Dev **Deck 13**

Blood Knights

Reign in blood

Videogames, it seems, are not immune to the vampire zeitgeist. But rest assured, there will be no creepy love triangles in the supremely sanguine hack-'n'-slash dungeon-crawler *Blood Knights*, even if the two bickering protagonists are unwillingly bonded together by a priest's magic spell.

Should players choose to tackle the game solo, they'll be able to transform from one character into the other on the fly, but really, the experience is designed for couch-based co-op (sorry, no online). Together with a friend, we guide sexy vampire Liz—who utilizes ranged crossbow



▲ *Panic in Paradise's* hazard-filled stages promise lots of nasty ways to bring bears to a sticky end.

HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **October** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Behaviour Interactive**

Naughty Bear Panic in Paradise

Destroy all teddy bears!

The first *Naughty Bear* caught a lot of flak from critics when it arrived in 2010, but there were a surprising number of interesting ideas lurking under its bland-looking exterior—first and foremost that the game was an incredibly dark slasher sim cloaked in a layer of goofy fluff.

The "stealthily scare/trap/murder all the cute bears, one by one" premise remains unchanged in *Naughty Bear: Panic in Paradise*, as does its stealth system, with which we can instantly become invisible to pursuers just by slipping into wooded areas. *Panic in Paradise* does boast some significant changes, though, including overhauled combat—which is now much less awkward, more combo-driven, and allows us to grab bears and drag them over to deadly environmental objects—more elaborate death animations, and a wide array of stat-boosting weapons and costumes (including the peeled-off faces of certain victims, which can be used to trick their friends).

Interestingly, Naughty no longer uses guns (except as a means to execute their owners), and it's no longer enough to simply kill each level's marquee victim; each one needs to be dispatched in unique ways, whether it's smashing superhero Danger Bear with his own Rod of Justice, or dragging Stardust into the woods while wearing the face of his brother, Sunbeam. Assuming the added variety can keep *Panic in Paradise* feeling fresh throughout, this could end up the game *Naughty Bear* should have been. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

Sick and Twisted

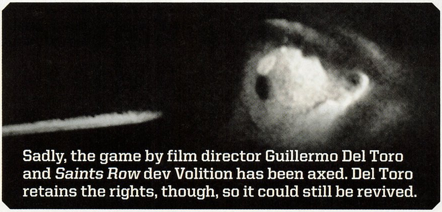
For the truly sadistic, the best part of *Panic in Paradise* may be driving victims insane through repeated shocks (like seeing their friends' corpses). Get them worked up enough, and they may kill themselves or others. Or we can just chop their heads off, whichever.

attacks—and beefy soldier-turned-demon Jeremy (who prefers a standard sword) on a downloadable journey through a dark medieval-fantasy version of Transylvania, stopping to exsanguinate plenty of vampires along the way.

Knights employs every fantasy trope in the book, so expect an RPG-ish leveling system, a series of unlockable skills (which translate to flashy new moves on the battlefield), and plenty of cutscenes peppered with impenetrable lore. The game does add a few unique touches, though, such as "blood suck," a maneuver that allows players to slow time, telekinetically lift an enemy from a distance, and toss him around, all while sucking that enemy's blood for health. From a game about vampires, we would expect no less.
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Where the hell is...

Guillermo Del Toro's InSane (THQ)



Sadly, the game by film director Guillermo Del Toro and *Saints Row* dev Volition has been axed. Del Toro retains the rights, though, so it could still be revived.

The latest on...

New shots, new games, new info

Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel

Format **PS3** ETA **March 2013**
Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Visceral Games**

Army of Two is back and is taking a turn for the serious. Visceral is taking the goofy, bro-tastic series in a new, "grittier" direction. Gone are Tyger and Selma... No, that's not right. Tyrion and Sean? Tyson and Salem! Anyway, Tyson, Salem, and all their fist bumps and high fives are gone, replaced by two competent (yet dulled-down) mercenaries, Alpha and Bravo. Some moments are still wonderfully cartoonish and violent, but the more somber story and characters keep *The Devil's Cartel* rooted in something darker than what we're used to in the series.

Sacred Citadel

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2013** Pub **Deep Silver**
Dev **Southend Interactive**

The latest in the *Sacred* series, *Sacred Citadel* is a prologue to Keen Games' *Sacred 3*. Up to three players can dive into this side-scrolling arcade brawler with several character classes to choose from.

DmC: Devil May Cry

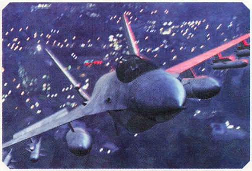
Format **PS3** ETA **January 2013**
Pub **Capcom** Dev **Ninja Theory**

Vergil (we're so excited just to say his name) will be in *DmC* fighting alongside Dante as part of the mysterious Order. He doesn't appear to be a bad guy this time around, but we expect plot twists.

Star Trek: The Game

Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2013** Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Digital Extremes**

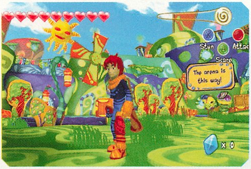
The Gorn are on New Vulcan. Remember the Gorn? Yeah, not many people do. The lizard-like species was only in one episode of the original series, but we're happy to welcome them back for nostalgia's sake.



Grand Theft Auto V

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**

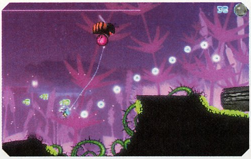
Are we seeing this right? Is that a fighter jet? And it may be pilotable? After so long with no new *Grand Theft Auto V* info, we get this prize of an image. Looks like it's time for the hysteria to start back up again.



Tink

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD** Pub **TBD** Dev **Mimimi Productions**

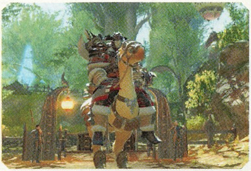
In the entirely crowd-funded action adventure *Tink*, we must stop a wildly colorful world from being overrun by the monochromatic Bleakness. The titular hero, Tink, can manipulate the world around him with the creative use of red, green, and blue.



Alien Spidy

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2012**
Pub **Kalypso Media** Dev **Enigma**

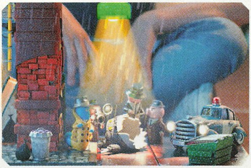
Spidy is on a mission to find all the parts to his spaceship and save his girlfriend, Virgi. It won't be easy, though. The sidescrolling, web-slinging levels quickly ramp up in difficulty and leave us sweating in our seats.



Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn

Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2013** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

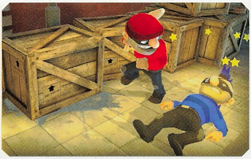
Rising from the ashes of *Final Fantasy XIV*, the rebranded *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn* hopes to accomplish something the PC version of the MMO initially failed at: Convincing people it's worth paying for.



Wonderbook: Diggs Nightcrawler

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2013** Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE London Studio/Moonbot Interactive**

A new film noir-esque story has been announced for Wonderbook. We'll help private detective Diggs Nightcrawler (a literal bookworm) solve a series of crimes in Library City, including the Silent Hill Silent Hill murder of his best friend, Humpty Dumpty.



Dollar Dash

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **Kalypso Media**
Dev **Candygun Games**

Plot? We don't need no stinkin' plot. All we need are 31 unique maps, goofy customizations, and four-player free-for-all theft. Challenge your friends in local or online multiplayer to see who comes out the richest.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Back for More

Over 100 PSone classics—including *Final Fantasy VII*—are heading for PS Vita.

▲ Store It

PlayStation Plus' cloud storage has been bumped up from 150 megabytes to a whopping full gigabyte. Score!

▲ Wonderbook!

Disney and the BBC have announced partnerships with Sony for Wonderbook.

▼ Lovely Tears

Recently discovered *Heavenly Sword 2* art just makes us sadder knowing we'll probably never see this beautiful game.

▼ Sniped

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 has been pushed back from October of this year to 2013.

▼ GooDbye

Sony has announced that Sony Liverpool—developer of the *WipEout* franchise—will be shutting its doors.

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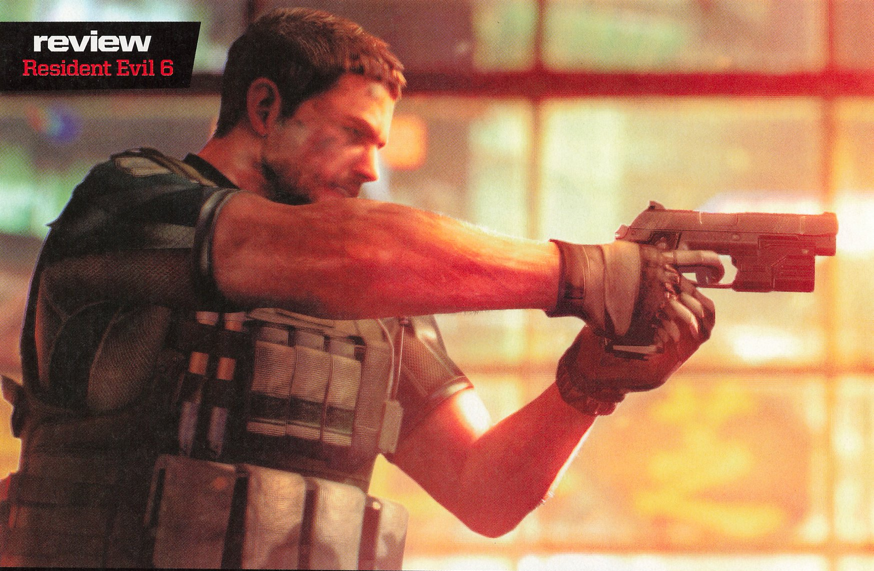
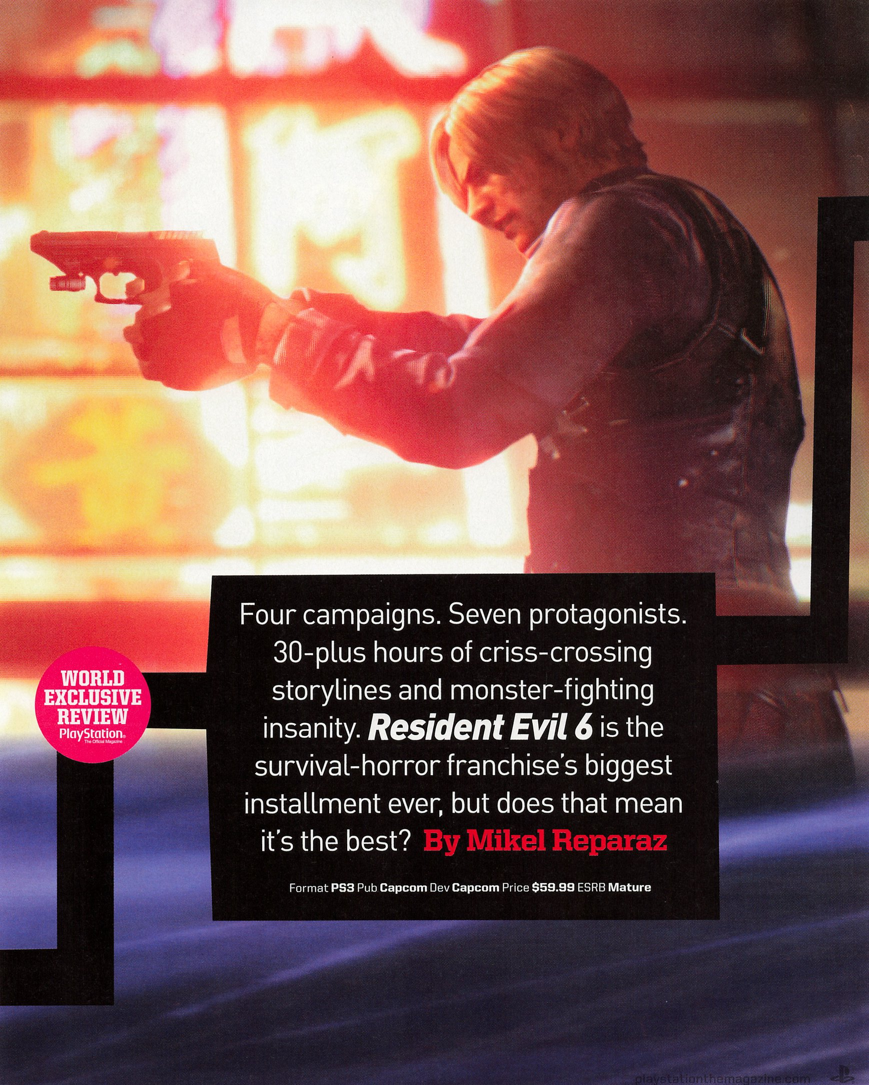


A TANGLED WEB



WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Four campaigns. Seven protagonists. 30-plus hours of criss-crossing storylines and monster-fighting insanity. ***Resident Evil 6*** is the survival-horror franchise's biggest installment ever, but does that mean it's the best? **By Mikel Reparaz**

Format **PS3** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom** Price **$59.99** ESRB **Mature**

Ada Wong has led us on a merry chase halfway across the world. At every turn, the elusive mercenary has managed to stay one step ahead, but now—in a warehouse nestled deep in the slums of Lanshiang, China—we're finally closing in on her. We've had to blast our way through an army of lab-spawned horrors to get this far, and we're not about to let her slip away now—although she's clearly not going to make it easy for us. Taunting us as she flees, she tosses down a smoke bomb and zips skyward with her grapnel gun, but we're ready for her tricks this time. Our partner rounds a catwalk, cutting her off, and we both advance, rifles trained on her face. End of the line, Ada.

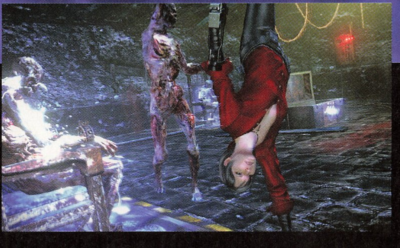
Just as we open fire, someone slams into us from behind, sending our bullets spraying wildly. Struggling with our assailant, we find our feet and manage to shove him away, drawing our pistol as he does the same. As our new foe glares at us from behind an immaculate sheaf of sandy blond hair, his eyes narrow in recognition.

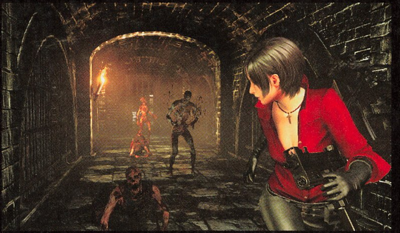
"Chris?" he asks, confused.

"Leon!" Chris replies. "What are you doing here?"

Global pandemic

Not counting its myriad spinoffs, the *Resident Evil* series has always been about two disparate storylines: the one that involves Chris Redfield, who in 16 years has gone from a luckless officer in a special police force to an operative for a U.N.-backed anti-bioterror agency; and that of





Company of Heroes

Seven central characters is a new high for *Resident Evil*—here's who we're taking into battle

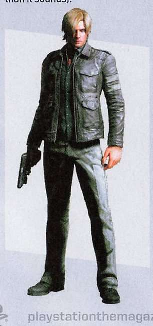
Leon S. Kennedy
Tasked once again with fighting zombie hordes, Leon—now an agent in the fictitious Division of Security Operations—gets to visit some of *RE6's* creepier locales, and can dual-wield pistols (which is less useful than it sounds).

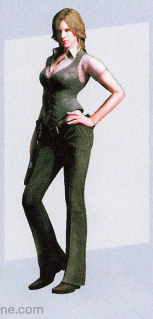
Helena Harper
Leon's new partner may blame herself for the events that befall the city of Tall Oaks, but she's just as tough as Leon—and she carries a unique three-barreled sawed-off shotgun called the Hydra, giving her players an early firepower boost.

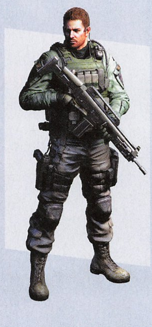
Chris Redfield
The longest-serving *Resident Evil* hero spends most of the game pursuing an obsessive vendetta against Ada Wong. He starts with a huge knife and a selection of heavy firearms ideal for massacring J'avo—and taking revenge.

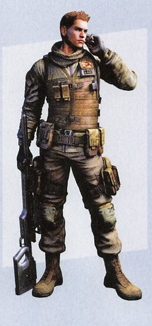
Piers Nivans
Skinnier than Chris but no less capable, Piers comes equipped with a powerful, thermal-scoped sniper rifle that comes in handy for spotting any hidden enemies lurking in *RE6's* darker environments.

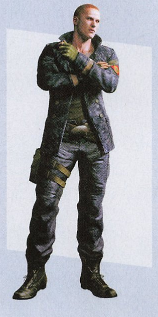
Jake Muller
The son of megalomaniac Albert Wesker, Jake shares his father's immunity to disease and martial-arts prowess (being the only character for whom unarmed combat is a weapon choice), but not his ambitions of conquest.

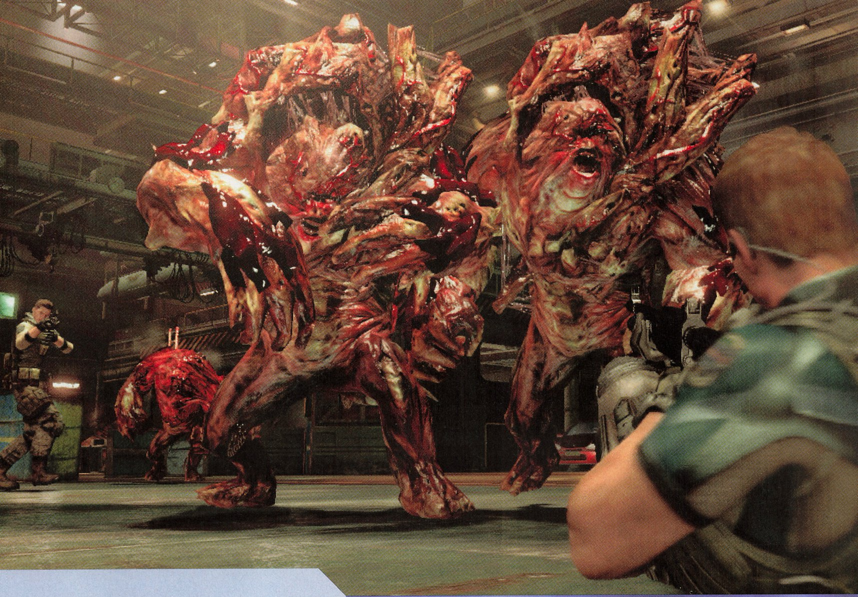












Sherry Birkin
Last seen as a little girl in *RE2*, Sherry's now a DSO agent who sports a chargeable stun rod, a burst-firing pistol, some flashy martial-arts skills, and a G-virus healing factor that never seems to keep her from getting killed in action.

Ada Wong
A wild card ever since her introduction in *RE2*, Ada goes full villain in *RE6*—or does she? Playing through her unlockable campaign (complete with crossbow) is the only way to find out what's *really* going on.

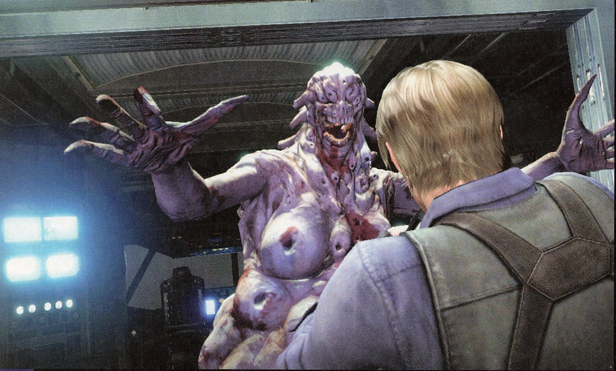
Missing In Action

Don't expect to see these fan-favorites return to duty in *RE6*

Jill Valentine
Jill's last appearance was in DLC for the disappointing *Operation Raccoon City*, and that seems to be how it's going to stay for now.

Claire Redfield
Unlike Jill, Chris' sister (and Leon's first partner) gets a mention or two in *RE6*, but never shows up to kick ass alongside her friends.

Sheva Alomar
Chris' partner from *RE5* is half the reason Albert Wesker is dead—and yet that wasn't enough reason to bring her back for the sequel.



The monster variety is greater than ever, giving us fun creatures like this repugnant, virus-spewing gasbag.

Leon S. Kennedy, who got his start as a skinny rookie cop in *Resident Evil 2*, only to come roaring back years later to reinvent action games as a buff government agent in *Resident Evil 4*. These narratives have occasionally bled into one another, but never fully intersected on screen—until now, of course. With no fewer than four parallel campaigns for us to bite into, *Resident Evil 6* finally brings Chris and Leon face to face, teaming them with the children of their greatest enemies (and with Leon's most enigmatic ally) for a globe-trotting, terror-filled epic.

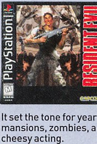
Well, maybe "terror" isn't quite the right word. *RE6* is packed to bursting with twisted, grotesque monsters, but only a few key moments throughout the game's convoluted plot could really be called *scary*. Instead, *Resident Evil 6* takes a cue from *Uncharted* and *Call of Duty*, adding huge action set-pieces and taking a more combat-focused bent than any of its predecessors. The result is a relentless monster of a game that's part *RE*, part shooter, part brawler, and unlike any other game we can think of.

For starters, there are the four distinct (but intersecting) storylines, each of which can take anywhere from six to 12

The Evolution of Resident Evil

Resident Evil

PSone 1996

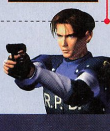


It set the tone for years: mansions, zombies, and cheesy acting.

Resident Evil: Director's Cut

PSone 1997

A remixed campaign with extra features and difficulties.



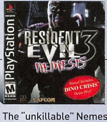
Resident Evil 2

PSone 1998

The outbreak spreads to the nearby Raccoon City in an escalating war against the undead.

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis

PSone 1999



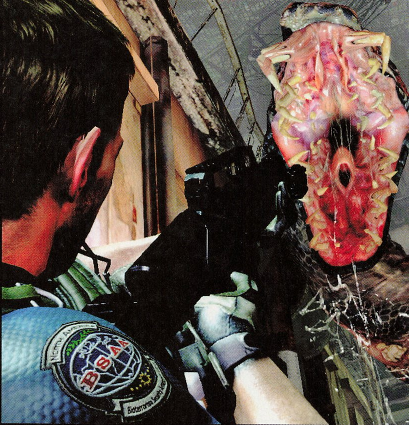
The "unkillable" Nemesis chases original heroine Jill through Raccoon City.

Resident Evil: Survivor

PSone 2000

PlayStation
RESIDENT EVIL
SURVIVOR
CAPCOM

Hybrid light-gun/FPS spin-off that lost its gun support for U.S. release.

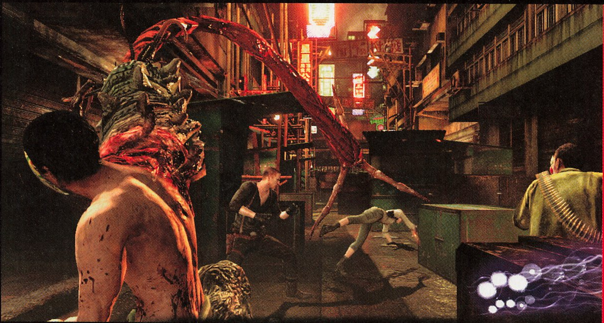


Chris' battle with this semi-invisible snake is an epic, but relatively tiny part of his third chapter.

hours to finish. Telling a sprawling, weirdly cheesy story of international conspiracies, apocalyptic doom, and petty revenge, they take us to zombie-infested America, war-torn Eastern Europe, and the soon-to-be-wrecked neon streets of a Hong Kong-inspired Chinese metropolis, all in a bid to stop the shadowy Neo-Umbrella terrorists and their plan to unleash the terrifying new C-virus on the world.

All four campaigns play similarly, but each has a different vibe. Leon and Helena's moody storyline, for example, is a riveting survival-horror blast that pits us mainly against zombies (and other, bigger monsters), and primarily takes place in eerie, puzzle-filled corridors and chaotic, monster-infested city streets. Chris and Piers, meanwhile, have a much more over-the-top, action-focused campaign that sees them taking on hordes of J'avo—mutating super-soldiers that can wield firearms, use cover, and regenerate limbs in unpredictably gruesome ways. Their campaign starts strong, but ends up light on atmosphere and puzzles, and especially heavy on gunfire, big set-pieces, and frustrating battles—and is easily the least enjoyable as a result.

Playing as Jake Muller or his

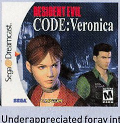


Harass the Heroes

Playing through the campaigns isn't all *RE6* has to offer; aside from Mercenaries mode, which lets us battle the clock to rack up kills in several open environments, finishing any one of the four campaigns unlocks access to Agent Hunt mode. This lets us hop into other players' games (provided they're playing one of the campaigns we've finished and have decided to allow Hunters) and terrorize them as J'avo, zombies, or other monsters, which we can buff up using Skill Points.

Resident Evil Code: Veronica

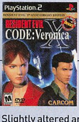
Dreamcast 2000



Underappreciated foray into 3D that saw Wesker return from the dead.

Resident Evil Code: Veronica X

PS2 2001



Slightly altered and tweaked update boasted more cutscenes.

Resident Evil Survivor 2: Code: Veronica

PS2 2001

The second light-gun offshoot never even arrived Stateside at all.

Resident Evil Gaiden

Game Boy Color 2001

Non-canonical entry featuring Leon and Barry on a zombie-riddled cruise ship.

Resident Evil (REmake)

GameCube 2002

One of the finest remakes of all time saw the Spencer Mansion grow and become even more dangerous.

partner Sherry Birkin (who, like Chris, mainly fight J'avo) is an invitation to experience some of the best and worst moments in the game, as fun departures into stealth and visits from the hulking Ustanak—a badass, Nemesis-like monster with a cybernetic arm who chases Jake and Sherry tirelessly through their storyline—give way to some profoundly infuriating motorcycle and snowmobile segments. And as for Ada, well, we don't want to ruin too much, but her campaign—which sheds new light on the story—is somewhere in between the others atmospherically, is infested with both zombies and J'avo, and may be the best of the bunch.

Boots and Bullets

Each of the heroes and their partners will eventually become armed to the teeth over the course of the game, although as we soon learn, just having a lot of guns isn't enough. *RE6* is a substantial re-invention of the franchise's gameplay, and that goes a lot deeper than just being able to move while shooting, or shoot from a prone position. At first, the temptation is to play *RE6* like a shooter—it certainly controls like one, and we can even stick to cover while we're aiming—but ammo's fairly scarce and our enemies are highly bullet-resistant, so relying completely on guns isn't an option. Then, we learn that up-close melee attacks (which include a lot of flashy pro-wrestling moves, weirdly) often work better than bullets, but tire our characters out in a hurry.

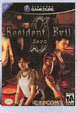
The trick, then, is to use a combination of both tactics on rank-and-file enemies, knocking them off balance with bullets to set them up for quick, fatal, close-quarters strikes. There are

Skills for Kills

At the outset, it may *seem* as though Leon's aim is awkward, or that the enemies are a little too tough for the "normal" difficulty setting. Take heart, though: by collecting Skill Points (in the form of little chess pieces earned from kills or found in crates), it's possible to buy skills that can do everything from steadying our aim and boosting health regeneration to imparting infinite ammo or granting damage bonuses against certain monsters. The best part is that they'll carry over through all the campaigns and online, meaning we can start as a Jake who's just as powerful as the Leon whose campaign we just finished.

Resident Evil Zero

GameCube 2002



Sumptuous pre-rendered backdrops make the official prequel the last beautiful *RE*.

Resident Evil Outbreak

PS2 2003

Online-enabled co-op survival entry starring previously unknown Raccoon City survivors.

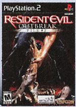
Resident Evil: Dead Aim

PS2 2003

Third-person movement and first-person shooting made for an interesting, but middling, hybrid of *RE* styles.

Resident Evil Outbreak File #2

PS2 2004



Five more scenarios for the *Outbreak* mold as Raccoon's residents try to flee the city.

Resident Evil 4

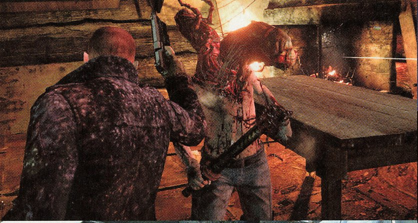
GC/PS2 2005

THE game of the last generation changed the face of all action games.

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence

DS 2006

Portable remake of the very first *Resident Evil*.



J'avo mutations do much more than look gross. This guy, for example, can trap us in webbing.

a few key moves that make this easier (which are only briefly explained during the tutorial prologue), like Quick Shots, which can stun an enemy with unaimed fire, and melee counters, which take careful timing to pull off. The end result is an experience that's easy to get into, but takes a fair amount of patience and trial-and-error to really understand. Once we do, *RE6's* quirky rhythms feel perfectly natural, although getting to that point can be a confusing and sometimes frustrating journey. (Not to mention a journey filled to bursting with quick-time events.)

At least we'll have company while we undertake it; more so than even *RE5*, co-op is built into *RE6's* DNA, with plenty of options to partner up online or via split-screen. Every protagonist (except Ada) has a partner whose abilities and path through each chapter differ somewhat from their own (giving us an incentive not just to partner up, but also to replay the campaigns from a different perspective). Left to computer control, these sidekicks are reliable and indestructible, although sharing the game's struggles with a live partner can be far more fun—especially since the guns, ammo and other items in the game can be picked up by both players, eliminating any competition for resources and making the big enemies easier to take down. And if we're playing online, then every time our story intersects with another, the game automatically matches us with up to two more co-op players, which makes the more competitive meet-ups much more interesting. (One caveat: there's no way to completely pause the game when online, even if no other players join.)

Bio-Organic Win

Resident Evil 6 is easily the biggest reinvention the series has seen since *RE4*, although that shouldn't be taken to mean that it's as revolutionary as *RE4* was. This is a game with a lot of ideas crashing through it constantly at high speeds, and while not all of them are great, most of them pay off beautifully. There's more content and variety here than in any other entry in the series, and its stories—while a little too goofy to really take seriously—are nonetheless fascinating, particularly for those of us who've watched these characters grow and develop over the years. It's also hard to find serious fault with the action, which—while certainly unusual, and riddled with tiny irritations—is fun, fast, and immensely rewarding. *Resident Evil 6* is a strange experience, to be sure—but more importantly, it's an unforgettable one.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
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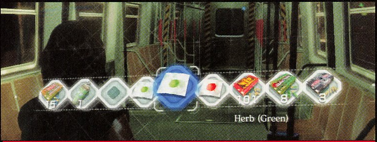
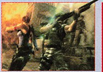


Keep It Together

Where *RE4* and (to a far lesser degree) *RE5* turned inventory management into a minigame unto itself, *Resident Evil 6* takes a more streamlined approach, simply dumping all of our items into two quick-access menus—one for weapons, and one for ammo, grenades, and healing items. Meanwhile, healing herbs have become a precious resource to manage; when we find them, they'll sit in our menu until we opt to dump them into our pillbox (at which point hitting R2 instantly refills a square of health). By combining herbs, however, we can make up to six pills at a time (by mixing three greens, or one green and one red). This presents us with a choice: do we use that solitary green while near death, or save it and press on until we find more?



Resident Evil 5

PS3 2009

An enjoyable but uneven co-op campaign stopped *RE5* from repeating *RE4*'s success.

Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles

Wii 2007

A surprisingly great on-rails lightgun shooter.

Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles

Wii 2009

Wii
RESIDENT EVIL
M
CAPCOM

Umbrella Chronicles sequel depicting events of *RE2* and *Code: Veronica.*

Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D

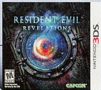
3DS 2011

EXCLUSIVE
NINTENDO 3DS
RESIDENT EVIL THE MERCENARIES 3D
M
CAPCOM

A weak spin-off based on the *RE4* and *5* bonus mode, The Mercenaries.

Resident Evil: Revelations

3DS 2012



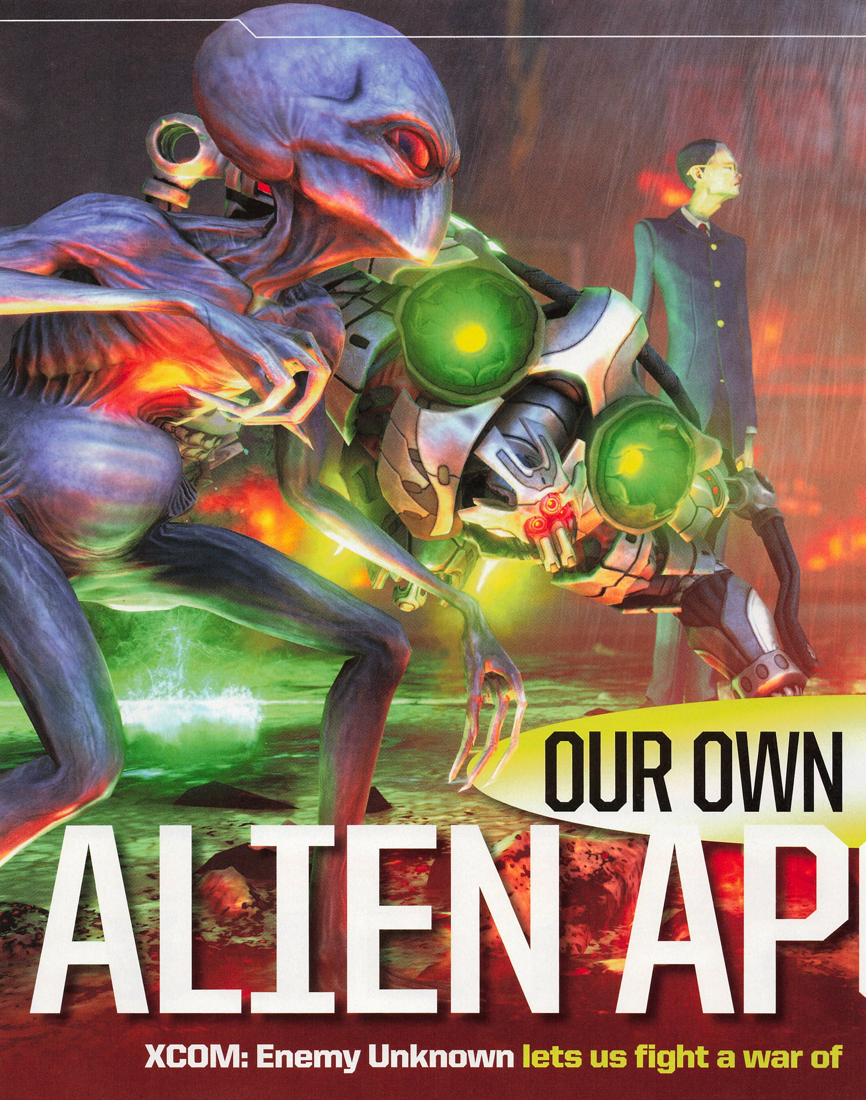
A prequel to *RE5* and a strong return to the series' horror roots.

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

PS3 2012

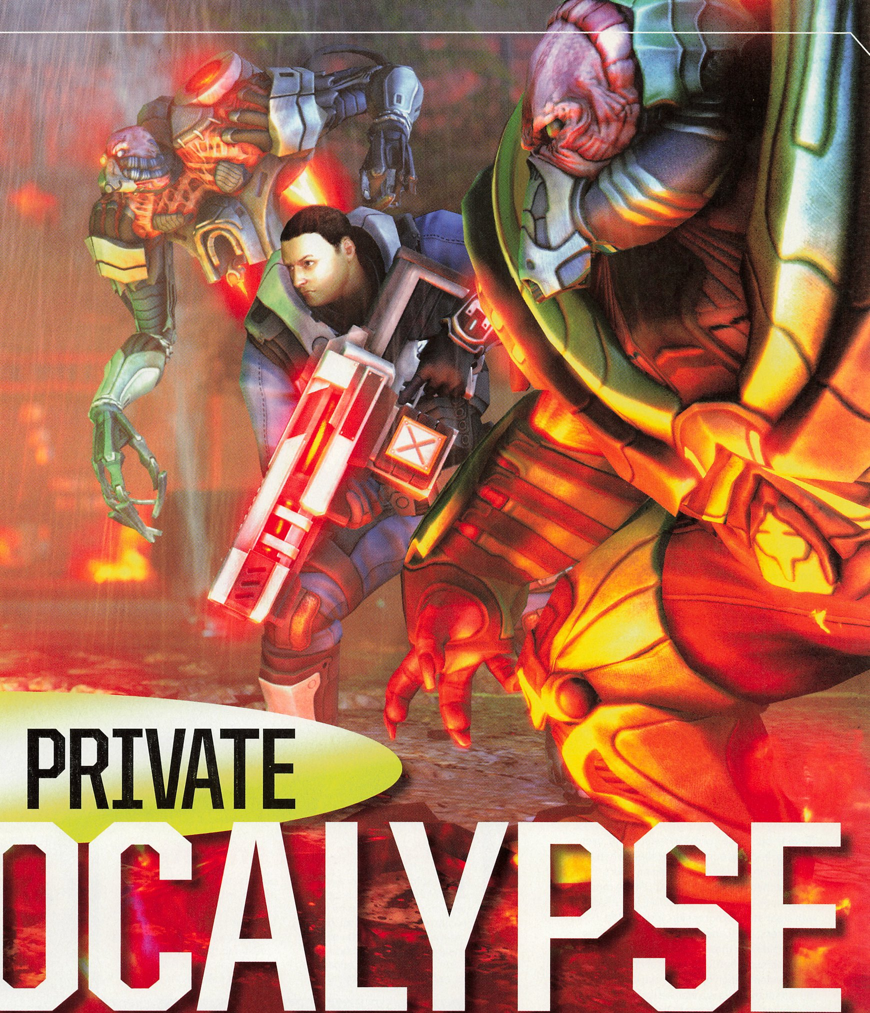
PS3
RESIDENT EVIL
Operation Raccoon City
M
SPECIAL EDITION
CAPCOM

A disappointing squad shooter that cast us as Umbrella special operatives.



OUR OWN ALIEN AP

XCOM: Enemy Unknown lets us fight a war of



PRIVATE OCALYPSE

the worlds on our own terms **By Mikel Reparaz**

Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Firaxis**

For devotees of 1993's *X-COM: UFO Defense,* the appeal of fending off an alien invasion as the titular shadowy agency was never just about strategy, or scares, or reverse-engineering captured alien technology to develop our own gear. Those things were great, sure, and *X-COM* offered plenty of them—but the *real* draw was in the game's open-endedness, and in the feeling of ownership that it inspired.

These weren't just faceless, computer-generated soldiers we were marching out of a Skyranger to investigate crashed UFOs and abduction sites—they were *our troops*, men and women who we'd personally recruited and raised up from cannon-fodder rookies, and their deaths represented hours of personal investment down the tubes. The base we'd dispatched them from was ours as well, built over time to our exact specifications in Central America or Antarctica or wherever else we felt like putting it. Even their gear was ours, the product of weeks of intensive R&D by our personal scientists. The end result may have been a bunch of little men crouching behind walls and shooting at other, alien-shaped little men—but our choices, and the feelings of personal attachment they created, turned the experience into something far more vivid.

Expecting *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*—a turn-based strategy reboot of the original, which once again pits fragile human soldiers against a concealed alien menace—to recapture feelings so clearly rooted in nostalgia for a nearly 20-year-old game seems unreasonable, even childish. Imagine our surprise, then, when a playthrough of the game's opening hours brought them trickling back. *XCOM* is a much better-looking game than *X-COM*, and it's one with clear story progression, identifiable characters, cutscenes, and more than a little hand-holding in those first few hours. However, its randomized battles, wealth of choices and deep customization options make it clear from the outset that this is a war we can fight on our own terms—and that, more than anything else, gives it the potential to feel like it's *ours*.

Failure's not an option

For some, decisions made in *XCOM* won't truly be meaningful if they can be easily reversed; after all, how careful will we be with our troops' lives if we can bring them back by simply reloading an earlier save? For these players, there's the Ironman option, which restricts us to one saved game, and auto-saves after every single turn. Deaths are permanent, choices can't be undone, and tactical blunders are something we'll just have to live with.

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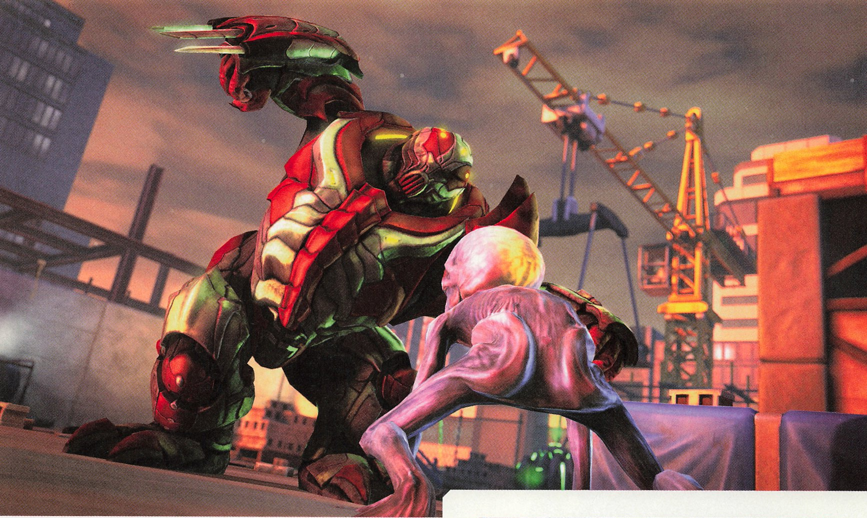
"I've done a lot of things to try and make that emotional connection stronger."

– Jake Solomon, Lead Designer



Multiplayer pits alien against alien in a contest of tactical skill and weird butts.

Cut Through the Fog

Nearly every mission in *XCOM* is procedurally generated, meaning maps and enemy placement are semi-randomized, and scale up depending on how far the invasion has progressed. This, along with the fog of war that shrouds any unexplored areas in darkness, means there's always an element of the unknown. Without a clear knowledge of where our enemies are—and given how easily our troops can be killed—things like stealth and cover are extremely important. Setting troops into Overwatch mode at the end of a turn—which lets them fire if they see alien movement—is essential to survival. And as we decide where to move our troops, every wall or barrier they can cower behind has a shield superimposed over it, representing how exposed our operatives will be. This isn't foolproof; ducking behind cover only gives the aliens a smaller target that they can outflank when it's their turn to move, and even fully protective cover can be destroyed completely.

When it's our turn to move, we keep our soldiers close together, moving forward in fits and starts—until an alien enters our line of sight, at which point everything stops dead. We can aim at them, using a direct over-the-shoulder view that lets us cycle automatically between targets, although depending on the skills of our individual soldiers, the odds of hitting might not be favorable. We can move around the multi-leveled maps to try and get a better shot, especially if higher ground is available, although if any aliens are in Overwatch (and they usually are) that could get one of our guys killed. Combat in *XCOM* is taut, suspenseful, and requires a certain amount of patience if we're going to make it through—and it's only one of *Enemy Unknown's* many moving parts.

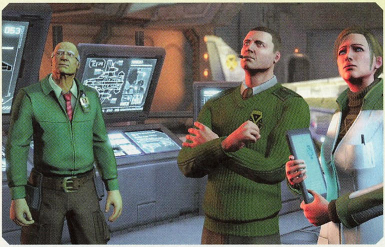
Dig Deep

Before we even take our first real steps into battle, we're presented with our first big choice: where to put our headquarters. It's from

The upgradable SHIV (Super Heavy Infantry Vehicle) can stand in for any one soldier in our squad.

here that we'll command our troops, scan the globe for trouble, and direct research and development of new technologies. It's also from here that we can chat with the game's handful of scripted characters: Central Officer Bradford, who guides us through every step of taking command; Dr. Vahlen, a slightly creepy scientist who oversees research into the alien corpses and technologies we recover after battles; Dr. Shen, our world-weary head engineer, in charge of building us cool stuff; and a shadowy representative for the Council, who doles out special missions and rewards while updating us on how much money we're getting from XCOM's member countries.

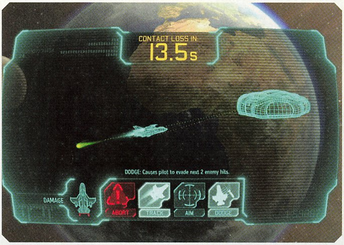
Those same countries also offer continent-specific incentives for building a base among them. If we decide to defend America's skies, for example, building aircraft will cost 50 percent less,



▲ Shen, Bradford, and Vahlen —together, they'll help us save the world (and also give us someone to talk to while we do so).

Move to intercept

Not all missions happen on the ground. As the invasion escalates, our scanners will start to pick up UFOs in flight, and we'll need to scramble fighter planes (which, like everything else, can be upgraded and replaced with more advanced models) to intercept them. Assuming we can catch up to our targets—which depends on where our aircraft are in relation to the alien ships—they'll attack in an automated battle that we can influence with a few simple commands (activated by consumable items). Succeed, and we'll have an alien-infested crash site that our troops can investigate and scavenge for alien tech. Fail, and we're out one expensive fighter jet.



As our soldiers grow more useful, something odd happens: we get attached.

while a European base will give us half-priced labs and engineering facilities. Whatever we decide, the bases are all underground, meaning anything beyond our basic starting facilities—like containment facilities to hold captured aliens or foundries that let us build better weapons—requires excavating new rooms, which takes several in-game days and gets pricier as we dig deeper.

While *XCOM* restricts us to just one base, our activities are still global; when we're not fighting or allocating our resources to various projects, we're scanning the globe with our upgradable satellite network. As our satellites spot trouble—usually in the form of "abduction sites" where aliens have moved in and eliminated the inhabitants—we're often presented with a choice of several places to defend. Each option carries different rewards and challenges, but we can only choose one—and the countries we *don't* choose will get an elevated panic level, and consequently cut our funding. That goes double in the case of

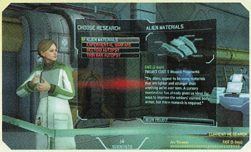
The first-person connection

To an outside observer, it might look as though the delayed, 1960s-set *XCOM* first-person shooter was "replaced" by the turn-based *Enemy Unknown* after negative fan reaction, but lead *EU* designer Jake Solomon says that was never the case.

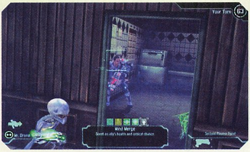
"Development started on *Enemy Unknown* at the very end of 2007," says Solomon. "We were both being developed concurrently for multiple years, side by side. So externally, I know it looked like they were these two different products, but internally we had been talking for years."

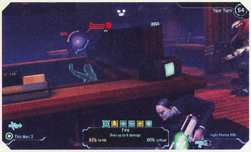
There's also a connection between the two games, says Solomon. "Not as much a narrative connection, but we tried to put in gameplay connections that we want the player to discover when they play, because we did put explicit references to the other games into both games.

"We're sort of like alternate-universe takes on *XCOM*," says Solomon. "We wanted to give ourselves that freedom, for [the shooter's developers] to tell the story they want to tell, and for us to sort of write a love letter to the original."


CHOOSE RESEARCH
ALIEN MATERIALS
ALIEN MATERIALS
EXPERIMENTAL WARFARE
SECTOID AUTOPSY
THIN MAN AUTOPSY
FAST (3 days)
PROJECT COST: 5 Weapon Fragments
BEGIN PROJECT
14
SCIENTISTS
CURRENT RESEARCH
Arc Thrower
FAST (5 days)

"The aliens appear to be using materials that are lighter and stronger than anything we've ever seen. A cursory examination has already given us ideas for ways to improve the soldiers' current body armor, but more research is required."


Your Turn
63
Mr. Drone
Mind Merge
Boost an ally's health and critical chance.
Sectoid Plasma Pistol


Your Turn
54
Thin Man 3
Fire
Does up to 6 damage.
81% to hit
60% critical
Light Plasma Rifle

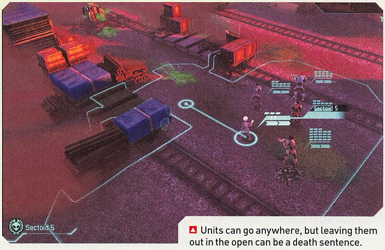
terror missions; as the alien invasion escalates from secretive abductions to all-out war, we'll need to rescue live civilians from death at the hands of Sectoids, Thin Men, Mutons, Outsiders, and whatever other creepy extraterrestrials are out murdering people. Every person who dies has a dramatic effect on their country's panic level. Fortunately, we've got some good people on our side.

Our Secret Army

"Playing the original, I always had these stories in my head about what the soldiers were, and I knew who they were, even if basically all they had was a name," says Jake Solomon, *XCOM's* lead designer. "Maybe you named them after friends and family, but you always had a story for these soldiers. I've done a lot of things to try and make that emotional connection stronger."

XCOM's troops are, from an objective standpoint, totally expendable. They all begin as raw recruits, with randomly generated faces and names appropriate for whichever randomly chosen country they hail from. We can rename them, if we want, and if they die, we can always hire more for relatively little money.

Once they survive a few battles, however, they start to grow. As each soldier levels up, he or she will automatically take on a class—some are natural snipers, others become assault troops with access to heavier weapons, and still others take support roles—as well as a nickname, which we can change. With each successive promotion, we'll be able to pick one of two special abilities or perks for them, like the ability to carry three medpacks instead of one, or to fire devastating shredder rockets. We're also able to equip them with a range of advanced gear, and as we research and develop new technologies, we can reward our best troops with things like plasma rifles and armor that enables invisibility or flight.



Units can go anywhere, but leaving them out in the open can be a death sentence.

As our soldiers become increasingly useful, something odd happens: we get attached. They stop being an expendable resource, and start being prized possessions that we gamble in every fight. We make our rookies stick close to them, and do whatever we can to keep them safe in battle. When they move into areas obscured by the game's fog of war, we tense up, hoping something isn't waiting in the gloom to mash them into pulp. When they're wounded—which makes them unavailable for extended periods after the mission—we immediately move to heal them or pull them back from danger.

"I want that connection to your soldier to feel strong," says Solomon. "When you see them in the base, they're interacting with each other, and then if you lose them, they go on the memorial wall, and you can go there and see the name of the soldier, how many missions they went on and what operation they died in. Personally, I'm happy with how we pushed the emotional connection to your soldiers."

Friends from another world

Even *XCOM's* multiplayer takes a free-form approach. Removed from the central narrative, it lets us form mixed teams of up to six aliens and customizable soldiers, all purchased using a pre-set number of points at the beginning of each match. Here are just a few of our options:

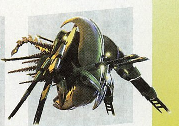
Floater
Fairly simple-minded and fragile, the Floater's main advantage is flight—which also lets it quickly cover more ground. Power it up and it'll float high above its enemies, making it well-suited for scouting and sniping duty.

Sectoid
If *XCOM* is chess, Sectoids are the pawns. Small, weak, and monkeylike, they're cheap cannon-fodder with simple plasma guns. However, they're still deadly, and their ability to psionically strengthen other units makes them valuable.

Chryssalid
One of the more disgusting aliens, Chryssalids can only attack at close range. If they kill an enemy, though, they'll turn that enemy into a zombie—which will eventually "hatch" as another controllable Chryssalid. *Gross.*

Muton
The rank-and-file of the alien army, Mutons are heavily armored grunts who can use the Blood Call ability to bolster themselves and any other nearby Mutons. They are, however, weak against psychic attacks from aliens or psionic humans.

Muton Berserker
Huge, well-armored and with a wide range of movement, the Muton Berserker can one-hit-kill just about anything at close range. It does, however, have one fatal flaw: it can't touch airborne enemies, making it helpless against them.



Cyberdisc
Resembling a flying saucer when closed, the Cyberdisc becomes vulnerable—and extremely deadly— when it opens up, at which point it can let loose with devastating heavy weaponry. Think of it as a floating alien tank.

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PlayStation The Official Magazine

Reviews

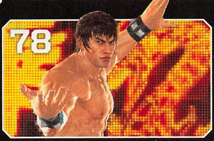
Your essential guide to new releases

Evolution is the key to a good sequel. The most successful sequels come from developers who listen to what the consumer has to say. *Borderlands 2* has everything we loved from the first game times a gajillion new things to crush on. Better story, better side quests, better toys, better everything. It's evolved from an already awesome game to something even more violently enthralling.

Tranformers games don't exactly have a flawless track record, but *Fall of Cybertron* is a step up for the rock 'em, sock 'em franchise and is arguably the best game of the bunch.

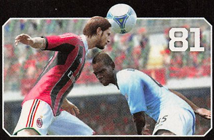
Even sports games learn from the past. Each year, developers have to find something new and exciting to make them truly stand out, and both *Madden NFL 13* and *NHL 13* found ways to outshine their predecessors.

The "unoriginal" complaint is most often aimed at blockbuster franchises. "It's just a clone. There's nothing new." With *Assassin's Creed III* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* just around the corner, we'll soon find out whether more publishers and developers have been listening to their public.



TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2

Tekken Tag 2 brings back much of what we loved in previous games, but maybe it's too familiar?



FIFA SOCCER 13

We never expect *FIFA* to be anything less that fantastic, and *13* doesn't disappoint, although the focus does seem to be very much on refinement.

RETRO/GRADE

Reverse rhythm games are even harder than normal rhythm games, and normal rhythm games are already pretty hard. Combine that with an arcadey space shooter-'em-up, and we've got an addicting new challenge.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near-flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.

22

Though *Borderlands 2* is still built for four-player co-op, it actually functions quite well as a solo experience.

Borderlands 2

Return of the shooter looter

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW PlayStation The Official Magazine

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

Typically, when a game claims to combine two or more disparate genres, what it really means is, "Hey guys, we borrowed a mechanic from this other genre and slapped it on our otherwise straightforward game." *Borderlands 2* is not one of those games. The quiet genius of this series has always been its uncanny ability to apply the broad concepts of loot- and leveling-based RPGs to modern-day, action-driven shooters.

Rather than importing this or that RPG mechanic wholesale, *Borderlands* roots out the underlying feeling that makes those mechanics compelling, and then invents its own unique ways to elicit those same reactions from players within an entirely new context. The process is so seamless, and the shooter action so compelling, that we barely realized we were secretly playing a breathtakingly deep RPG until we stepped back to really examine the experience.

Info

Format PS3
Pub 2K Games **Dev** Gearbox Software
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like a more complete version of the already-stellar original.

Gun Nuts

The best example is, of course, the weapons system—which is to say, the gazillion glorious guns that *Borderlands 2* proffers upon its players. Unlike most shooters, there's no set roster of firearms doled out gradually at key moments in the story campaign. Rather, weapons are generated essentially at random, and each offers not only a unique set of innate stats (including damage, clip size, reload speed, and more), but an unpredictable range of add-ons and quirks as well: elemental damage ranging from fire to electricity to acid, bayonets on everything from rocket launchers to pistols, sniper rifles that burst-fire when scoped. The variety is absolutely staggering, and the fact that all items are color-coded for rarity sends our gear lust through the roof.

Want More?

Oh, you *think* you want more, but trust us, you've got plenty. *Borderlands 2* may not offer competitive multiplayer, but its co-op campaign easily lasts several dozen hours. And even by the end, your character won't be anywhere near the level cap. Multiple playthroughs are a given.

And really, that's the key: newer, better guns are actually worth tracking down. We, as shooter fans, genuinely want to seek out the rarest, most powerful weapons. While looting in many RPGs feels lifeless and boring, the idea of finding that next amazing weapon—one that directly impacts and often improves our immediate gameplay experience—is an incredibly powerful motivator. It not only adds a rich strategy metagame (Do I sell this assault rifle to pay for a new SMG? Do I really need to devote a precious item slot to an incendiary grenade mod?), it ▸▸

Five Tips for budding Vault Hunters

1 **Cash Flow** Money isn't as useful as you might think. The best items can all be found or earned rather than purchased.

2 **On the Hunt** Go exploring. The story may not guide you to every place you see, and you'll likely find serious loot.

3 **With a Bullet** Some guns use multiple bullets per shot. Keep a watchful eye on your ammo counter.

4 **My Little Friend** Playing through alone? Axton's auto-turret skill is indispensible. Pick him if you want to live.

5 **Best for Last** Found a weapon with a level requirement that exceeds your own? Place it in Sanctuary's safe until you can use it.

gives us a reason to take side missions, to explore the world, to continue playing the game.

The unfortunate flipside, however, is that item management plays a major role in the overall experience, whether we want it to or not. Without periodically upgrading our arsenal, we simply won't be able to kill higher-level enemies, and with a very limited number slots in our backpack, that sometimes means stopping in the middle of a firefight to decide whether or not the new gun that an enemy just coughed up is worth grabbing if it means dropping another item to make room. The process can feel tedious and occasionally hampers the game's momentum; impatient players looking to run wild will likely leave frustrated.

Numbers Game

If you can stomach the seemingly endless stat-comparing, though, you'll be treated to some of the finest first-person shooting this side of *Call of Duty*. Naturally, the steady stream of exciting new firearms keeps the action feeling consistently fresh, but it also helps that the underlying mechanics are impeccable. The aiming is intuitive without holding our hand too tightly, bullets feel like they have real impact on our enemies, and movement and camera controls never draw attention to themselves—which, of course, means they're doing their job.

Beyond the actual shooting, many of the original *Borderlands'* fun-focused design decisions return as well. We enjoy infinite sprinting, zero fall damage, plentiful ammunition, and all types of inexplicable exploding barrels littered throughout every environment. We actually love the fact that the game never bothers to justify most of its reality-defying aspects—*Borderlands 2* simply embraces the fact that it's a videogame, and that's something to be applauded.

The series' clever approach to health also returns: While the health bar itself doesn't regenerate automatically, we can equip shields that gradually recharge and occasionally offer bonus effects—like absorbing bullets or damaging melee attackers. And while we can no longer carry health packs, we can equip class mods or invest in skills that allow us to naturally regain health under certain conditions, an option that feeds back into the same risk/reward metagame that stems from assembling our loadout. Again, this might annoy impatient players, but it adds undeniable depth for those sick of standard shooters.

Cast List

THE COMMANDO

Axton
A solid all-around choice with a deadly auto-turret.

THE SIREN

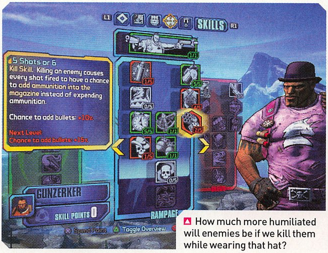
Maya
A more defense-oriented character with some awesome telekinetic abilities.

THE GUNZERKER

Salvador
An offensive powerhouse who can dual-wield any two guns.

THE ASSASSIN

Zero
A stealthy warrior who uses sniper rifles and katana.



5 Shots or 6
Kill Skill. Killing an enemy causes every shot fired to have a chance to add ammunition into the magazine instead of expending ammunition.

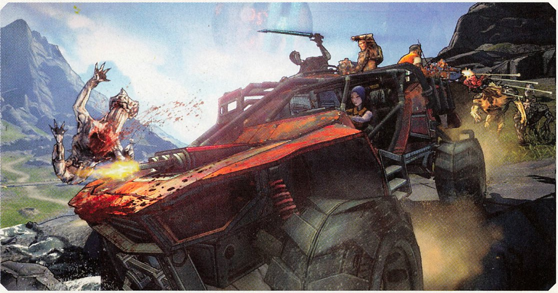
Chance to add bullets: +10%

Next Level:
Chance to add bullets: +15%

▲ How much more humiliated will enemies be if we kill them while wearing that hat?

A powerful resource called Eridium plays a major role in the story, and also allows us to purchase upgrades that increase the size of our storage system.

Environmental textures can be slow to load, but it's a forgivable hiccup.



Land of the Free

Borderlands 2's depth extends beyond its mechanics, though. Its revamped version of Pandora—a distant, inhospitable planet overrun with bandits, treasure hunters, and other delightful scumbags—rivals the likes of *Fallout 3's* Capital Wasteland in terms of both size and diversity. Unlike the Wastes, however, Pandora is structured as a series of open-world hubs that also connect to—for lack of a better word—dungeons (once again revealing the game's ability to subtly implement RPG ideas in a shooter setting). This setup allows us to explore, backtrack, and generally play as we see fit, and despite this freedom, we never felt lost.

Contained within this vast world is every type of environment imaginable, from claustrophobic corridors to wide-open plains. One minute, we were scaling a snowcapped mountain, and the next we were tearing through the desert in a dune buggy, with both areas bursting with impressive visual detail. The variety of enemies is similarly astounding. Some morph into more powerful forms if we fail to kill them quickly. Others, like arms manufacturer Hyperion's robots, can be dismantled if we shoot their vulnerable joints. *Borderlands 2's* enemy types outnumber just about every game we can think of, and the constant arrival of new and unexpected foes not only kept us on our toes, but made our strategic choices much more meaningful as well.

But the glue that holds it all together is also *Borderlands 2's* biggest improvement: the story. While much of the rest of the game feels like iteration and improvement on existing ideas from the first game, the narrative elements feel far more fully realized. Four treasure hunters arrive on Pandora looking for work. A psychotic CEO named Handsome Jack tries to kill them, and when he fails, they join a resistance movement fighting to prevent Jack from awakening an ancient warrior and ruining the planet for everyone.

The narrative is dead simple but still satisfying, and more importantly, the game does an excellent job of leveraging the plot to provide us with real motivation. Side missions aren't meaningless errands, they're opportunities to discover amusing new characters (and possibly earn some sweet loot). Story battles have an actual point rather than simply being a nonsensical series of explosions. And while the game definitely pours it on a little thick at points, *Borderlands 2's* goofy sense of humor makes the entire experience that much more likable.

Habit Forming

It's worth noting that *Borderlands 2* is a tremendously long game, and leveling up a character takes dozens of hours (though the new Badass Rank system provides incremental rewards for, well, just about everything along the way). For those among us whose gaming habits tend to be a bit ADD, maybe knock a point off the score. For everyone else, though, find three friends for the streamlined, accessible co-op, and strap in for a seriously engrossing game that really, truly blends shooters and RPGs to brilliant effect.

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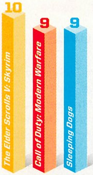
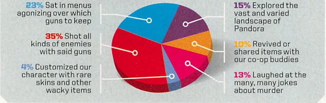
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

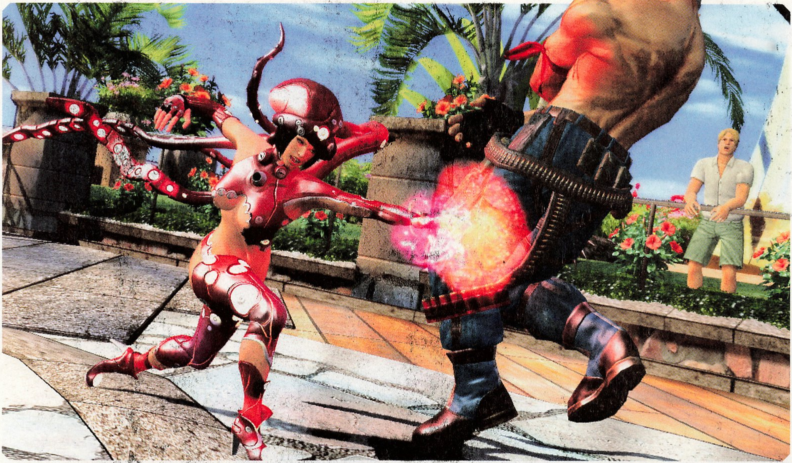


ScorePole

Is it an RPG? An FPS? An open-world game? Regardless, *Borderlands 2* is up there with the best.

What we did in... Borderlands 2





Tekken Tag Tournament 2

An old master in need of some new moves

Info

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Namco Bandai
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like more of the *Tekken* we always loved—frozen in time.

The arrival of a new *Tekken* used to merit fanfare and excitement. *Tekken* wasn't just one of the best 3D fighters around, it was a surprisingly accessible party game that anyone could enjoy. But 3D fighters, like 2D fighters and scrolling shooters, have grown in complexity while losing both novelty and mass appeal. So now we have *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*, a massive "dream match" of a *Tekken* that has almost every *Tekken* character ever, yet few new ideas or noob-friendly overtures.

Which isn't to say that *Tag 2* isn't a pretty good fighting game, because it certainly is. It builds on the fairly solid foundation of *Tekken 6*, with the core gameplay and returning characters feeling very similar to how they did in 2009 (a little *too* similar, given the three year gap). The biggest change comes in the return of the tagging feature from 1999's *Tekken Tag Tournament*, which lets us swap between two fighters on the fly and (with strong character knowledge and dexterity) perform some of the most intricate combos the series has yet seen.

Noob Horizons

While hardly bursting with single-player options, *Tag 2* still offers the expected modes—Time Attack, Team Battle, Survival, Arcade—as well as the somewhat novel Ghost Battle and Fight Lab. The former takes its cue

Paterfamilias Tekken's history of daddy issues, tossing, and smirking

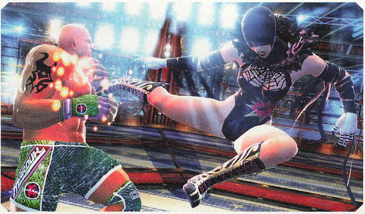
1 **PRE-TEKKEN**
Heihachi starves father Jinpachi to death in basement. Tosses young son, Kazuya, into ravine. Adopts Lee just to make Kaz jealous.

2 **TEKKEN**
Kazuya tosses his defeated father, Heihachi, off a cliff. Revels in the poetic justice by smirking a lot.

3 **TEKKEN 2**
Heihachi tosses his defeated son, Kazuya, into an active volcano. Smirks harder. Like, super-hard.

4 **TEKKEN 3**
Heihachi shoots grandson Jin in the head, suppressing a smirk. Jin is resurrected, tosses Heihachi through a wall.

5 **TEKKEN 5**
Kazuya, smirking, tosses Heihachi into non-smirking (but exploding) Jack-4 robots. Jinpachi is resurrected, but grimaces more than smirks.



▲ The custom costumes are as ridiculous as ever. Then there's the swimsuit DLC...

BOB
49
BAEK
Player1
Player2

▲ The only character we still kind of miss is Dr. B.—DLC, perhaps?

from *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution's* Quest mode, letting us battle A.I. characters that loosely simulate the fighting styles of other human players. The A.I.'s nothing special, but we preferred zoning out during the constant flow of strangely bedecked Ghosts to slogging through the rote, linear progression of the Arcade mode. Fight Lab is essentially a tutorial—a sequence of missions in which we customize Lee Chaolan's newly created Combot as he instructs us on basics like tagging and juggling. With only five episodes and limited variety, Fight Lab isn't terribly entertaining and proves only marginally helpful as a tutorial.

Practice mode could have made up the difference, but despite a superb feature set for mid-level and expert players, it falls short for newcomers. The move lists are spartan, offering no clue as to why one mid-hitting gut punch may be better suited to a situation than four or five similar moves. With even simple fighters having almost 100 moves, this lack of clarity will further discourage the uninitiated. Sure, buttonmashing still works, but overall, *Tag 2* pushes heightened complexity at the expense of casual fun. That's dangerous because fresh blood's essential to sustain a fighting-game community.

But enough about the noobs. There's a lot to be said for *Tag 2's* massive cast, which will push past 50 once the DLC starts rolling. Outside of weird one-offs like manga dino Gon, just about everyone is or will soon be available, which, combined with its *Tekken 6*-style action, instantly makes *Tag 2* the new go-to game for *Tekken*-philes. If you want to play some modern *Tekken*, this is the version to get.

The problem is that "modern" *Tekken* feels a bit stale. The series' last big leap came with *Tekken 5*, and that was at least partially due to *Tekken 4* being such a misstep—*5's* course-correcting changes simply stood out by comparison. *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection* and *Tekken 6* just felt like modest upgrades, and now *Tag 2* is just a slightly refined *Tekken 6* with an added tag feature. While it's undeniably a well-crafted fighter, it isn't fresh anymore, and we'd be lying if we said we didn't feel some ennui. Make no mistake, it's great to have all the characters, the costume customizations are still funny, and the technical aspects are mostly up to par. But the fighting doesn't feel significantly changed or enhanced, leaving us still craving the excitement that used to come with each new *Tekken*. **ALEXANDRA HALL**

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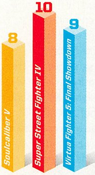
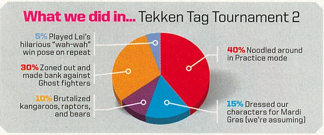


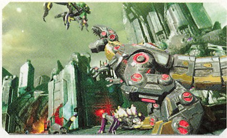
ScorePole

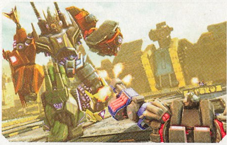
Tag 2 sees Namco's flagship fighter in cruise control.

What we did in... Tekken Tag Tournament 2



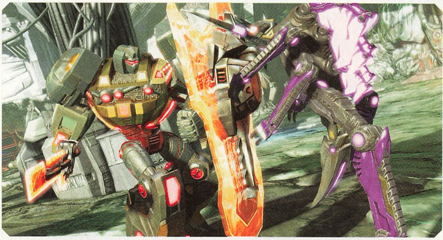
Destroying a dying world with giant robots hasn't gotten old yet.





Transformers Fall of Cybertron

Transformers, but not transformative



Info

PS3
TRANSFORMERS
FALL OF CYBERTRON
ACTIVISION

Format PS3
Pub Activision
Dev High Moon Studios
Price $59.99
It's like *War for Cybertron* with dinobots and bugs.

The titles really say it all: 2010's *War for Cybertron* has now resulted in the *Fall of Cybertron*, which continues the bleak tale of the final days of the Transformers' homeworld. While the game picks up the story in dramatic fashion, it also introduces a few not so welcome changes. The main cooperative story mode is gone, and with it went our ability to choose which bot to use in a given mission. Instead, the game is actually more linear than before, saddling us with pre-defined characters for each of the 13 missions.

The Autobot roster includes Bumblebee, Jazz, Optimus Prime, Cliffjumper, and the much-lauded dinobot Grimlock. The Decepticon team lets us take control of Megatron, Shockwave, and various Contructicons (including the Voltron-like combination bot Bruticus). The game provides a good variety of robot types, but the main attraction doesn't come until the last quarter of the game when the dinobots are finally unleashed.

Levels are generally large, and the action is fun and intense. Currency is earned through destruction, which allows the robots to upgrade themselves and their weapons regularly. The game is generous enough to ensure regular power upgrades that are effective across the board, ensuring that any playable robot has the same perks. The variety of weapons is impressive as well. Robot-appropriate versions of shotguns, rockets, grenades, sniper rifles, EMP and goo blasters, and an array of assault weapons make it fun to just try new guns out. Powerups like shields, defensive bots, health, and energy boosters help out when the action gets intense. Combat is kept simple (it's mostly gunplay), but the controls are solid, accessible, and nearly identical to the previous game. However, it can be a little too easy to inadvertantly transform with the L3 button, and we'd still like to see a more in-depth combo system.

War for Cybertron's sadly under-appreciated multiplayer gets a second chance here thanks to an array of team-based modes, a superb robot customization system, and great reward system that tracks everything and rewards players accordingly. The Horde-like escalation co-op mode is excellent as well.

The Transformers themselves are remarkably detailed with terrific amounts of tiny animated parts, and the world is a fully realized wasteland. The graphics are slightly grainier than we'd like, but *Fall of Cybertron* still makes excellent use of the Unreal engine overall. The audio is terrific, with familiar voice acting and dramatic music.

Fall of Cybertron does exactly what fans expect. It's not innovative or wildly creative, but the gameplay is fun and the multiplayer is excellent. The lack of choice and co-op in the main campaign is disappointing and the game should have made more use of the dinobots, but otherwise, we thoroughly enjoyed our return to Cybertron. **JASON D'APRILE**

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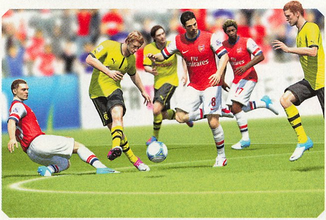
Nothing feels quite as good as executing that perfect goal-scoring move (and then saving and sharing it online).



FIFA Soccer 13

If it ain't broke...

Info
Format PS3
Pub EA Sports **Dev** EA Canada
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like just another year of *FIFA* being predictably excellent.

Another year, another *FIFA*. For *FIFA 13*, the updates and upgrades aren't as visibly significant as previous years but nonetheless ensure soccer fans around the globe will have plenty to debate. When one of the most significant updates is the skill games, it's hard to muster serious excitement, but *FIFA* is *FIFA*—it's been a dominant force for so long it has to be good, right? Well, of course. It's very good, as we now expect. This year's installment just isn't a revolutionary leap.

Those skill game additions are actually a major tutorial overhaul masked in a format that's both effective and addicting. The loading screen "run up and score" motif has been replaced by stellar skill challenges that will truly improve any player's abilities and legitimately help with some of the game's tougher mechanics. The close-contact dribbling mechanic, for example, can be effective for keeping possession, but its control requirements will likely intimidate and exclude less advanced players.

Playing a career as a player or coach (much like the online opportunities in *FIFAs*-past) is thoroughly engaging, even if the expectations of our newly-crafted star are very, very strict, meaning failure is definitely an option. And while *FIFA 13* looks fantastic, players would no doubt appreciate more advanced commentary, which, though acceptable, has way too many "this team..." and "that player..." mentions to sound truly authentic. **ALEX CLARK**

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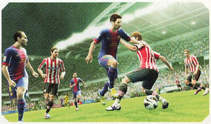

Pro Evolution Soccer 2013

Playing with heart

What matters most in your soccer gaming experience? If it's teams, authenticity, and broadcast presentation, then *FIFA* wins. If it's core fundamentals of passing and physics, then *PES* is your boy. Not that *FIFA's* passing and physics are poor, or *PES's* authenticity isn't effective. It's just that the licenses fundamentally make *FIFA* an easier pick for a casual soccer fan, so it's important to appreciate the finer points of physics and A.I. routines to get the most from *PES*. Because here, Konami's effort really shines. On the field, the flow is excellent, backed by that time-tested physics engine that makes the ball react like it should (so when Ryan Giggs had a shot blocked but the rebound caromed off his torso into the net, it felt very real).

Navigating the menus is still a pain, though. And even if we fight through that, the career modes are still a little wonky and certainly not as slick as *FIFA's* offering. Plus, unless players are Manchester United or Barcelona fans, they need to accept pale substitutions for their favorite teams. Still, despite its clunky presentation, you can't go wrong in a soccer sim with *PES*. The action's effective and fluid, and the animation is at times as beautiful as the sport demands. **ALEX CLARK**

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Info

Format PS3
Pub Konami
Dev Konami
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like an ugly but effective player tearing up the pitch.

Rock Band Blitz

Our old favorite band is back on tour

Info
Format PSN
Pub Harmonix **Dev** Harmonix
Price $14.99 **ESRB** Teen
It's like still rockin' after the instruments have been smashed.

Years before we were all annoying our neighbors by hosting *Rock Band* parties and jamming on plastic instruments, music games like *Frequency* and its sequel *Amplitude* had us grooving on the DualShock. *Rock Band Blitz* is essentially an extremely addicting modernization of the two wrapped in familiar *Rock Band* flavoring.

There are no peripherals here—all 25 songs are played with the PS3's controller. Hitting a certain number of notes on an instrument lane (guitar, bass, drums, vocals, and keyboard) "levels up" the multiplier of that lane for the duration of the song. As checkpoints are reached, the multiplier cap potentially increases, but neglecting any lane for too long means the cap won't rise, which guarantees a bottom spot on the online leaderboards.

Elusive power-ups like "Bandmate," which auto-plays a track while we have Overdrive energy, add an extra layer to the frantic dash to rack up points. Though the fun eventually wore thin, finding the ultimate combo of score-smashing power-ups kept us hooked for hours. Just ask our thumbs. They're pretty bruised from all that blitzing.

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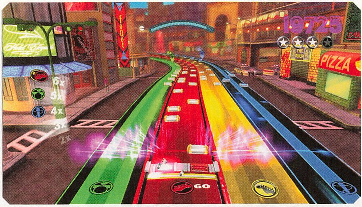
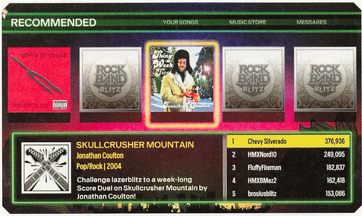
RYAN TALJONICK

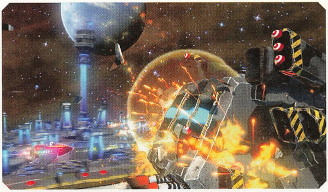


Nearly every song in the *Rock Band* library can be played in *Rock Band Blitz*.



SKULLCRUSHER MOUNTAIN
Jonathan Coulton
Pop/Rock | 2004
Challenge lazerblitz to a week-long Score Duel on Skullcrusher Mountain by Jonathan Coulton!

1	Chevy Silverado	376,936
2	HMXNord10	249,095
3	FluffyFireman	182,837
4	HMXBMez2	162,418
5	brosiusblitz	153,086



Ample practice is required to pull off higher difficulty levels.

Retro/Grade

One crazy spacefaring musical mashup

Info
Format PSN
Pub 24 Caret Games
Dev 24 Caret Games
Price $9.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like *Guitar Hero* meets *Galaga* in space...backwards.

Finally, a good reason to dust off our long-neglected plastic axes. 24 Caret Games' inventive hybrid of wacky space shoot-'em-up and rhythm game doesn't require a guitar controller to enjoy, but it's a hell of a lot more entertaining with one. *Retro/Grade* oddly picks up at the finale, right as the heroic Rick Rocket destroys the final boss and creates a rift in space that makes time flow backwards. Piloting our spacecraft in reverse and blasting enemies en-route to the beginning of the game by strumming notes and fingering frets in time to the techno soundtrack is totally bizarre—and just the kind of creative music genre reboot we've been craving.

Much like *Guitar Hero* games, playing each stage on multiple difficulties adds tons of replay value. On its easier settings, we only switch between two colored space lanes in battle, but cranking it up to the highest setting has us zipping up and down frantically between five note lanes, dodging attacks and zapping foes. Steep challenge and learning curve aside, *Retro/Grade* is fresh, funky, and super fun. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

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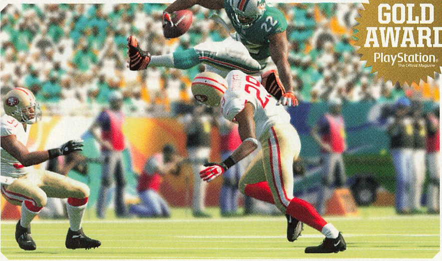
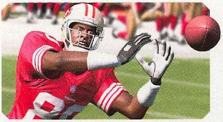


GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine

Madden NFL 13

Once more, with feeling



Connected Career is a satisfying new all-encompassing mode, but why scrap the straightforward Franchise mode entirely?

Info
Format PS3
Pub EA Sports **Dev** Tiburon
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like *Madden*, but really improved.

It's not often that an annual sports game reinvents itself. After all, the yearly release schedule lends itself to incremental adjustments and nuanced improvements. After several years of doing exactly that, however, *Madden NFL 13* is a generation-defining effort.

The introduction of the Infinity Engine—a physics-based system that fundamentally impacts how the on-screen athletes react when they collide—has turned the game on its head. Each tackle takes on new meaning, as the weight and muscle tension of players dictate whether they stay up or hit the turf, with incredibly realistic results.

Of course, given that it's *Madden's* first go-round with real-time physics, there are a few hiccups. Individual limbs don't always seem to go in the right direction, and players sometimes fall down like bowling pins when they brush up against each other. Even so, it's a trade-off we'd take 100 times out of 100—the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks.

Another major overhaul this season is the introduction of Connected Careers, an all-encompassing mode that scraps traditional Franchise, Superstar, and Online options in favor of a streamlined offering. We choose to either coach an entire team or take on the persona of an individual athlete. As we complete tasks, we earn XP, which we can then allocate across dozens of attributes. These vary depending on whether we're running a club or managing a single person, but either way, the decisions we make significantly impact our experience. Best of all, we can have up to 31 of our friends join us or just go it alone. Between Connected Careers' immersion and the strategic options that XP allocation provides, it's the freshest way to play Madden in, well, forever.

Other improvements abound, too, including much better passing mechanics and the elimination of so-called "leapin' linebackers." The overall look and feel of the game is modeled after a full TV-style presentation, as EA Trax have been kicked to the curb in favor of orchestral themes. These are all welcome additions to a franchise that was in danger of growing stale.

After a couple of up-and-down seasons, the *Madden* team doubled down this year and the results are stellar. This is the football game we've wanted since the PS3 era began. **RICH GRISHAM**

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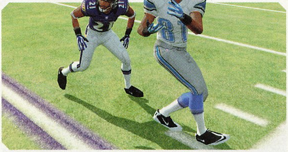

Playing as RG3 or Andrew Luck in Superstar mode is terrific bite-sized fun.

We hope next year's game brings full cross-play and cross-save features—that'd make it a guaranteed buy.

Madden NFL 13

Good fun...with a caveat

Info

Format PS Vita
Pub EA Sports
Dev HB Studios
Price $39.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like playing a tuned-up version of *last year's* game. That's not a bad thing.

Like a top draft pick that doesn't quite make the Pro Bowl, the PS Vita version of *Madden NFL 13* is great at times but never quite reaches its full potential. On the field, *Madden* shines brightly: It looks terrific in motion and plays well, and longtime *Madden* players will instantly be familiar with the controls and play-call mechanics. What's more, touchscreen controls are smartly implemented. Performing a juke with a running back is as simple as double tapping the rear touchpanel, and putting a receiver at the line in motion is a tap-drag on the front. Simple, elegant, functional.

The problem is what's not in the game. With no cross-play or cross-save capabilities between PS3 and Vita, *Madden* loses appeal for owners of both systems. Also, there's no Connected Careers or Infinity Engine, two of the features that have transformed *Madden* on the home console this year. While Vita's Franchise, Superstar, and Online modes are meaty, they're also well worn and overly familiar by now. In a vacuum, *Madden NFL 13* is great. That's good enough for some of us, but others will lament what it could have been. **RICH GRISHAM**

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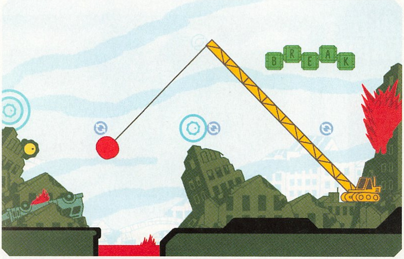
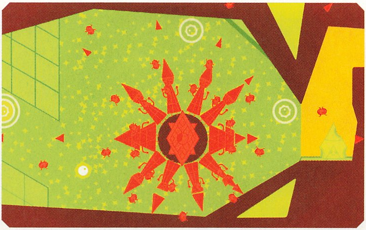
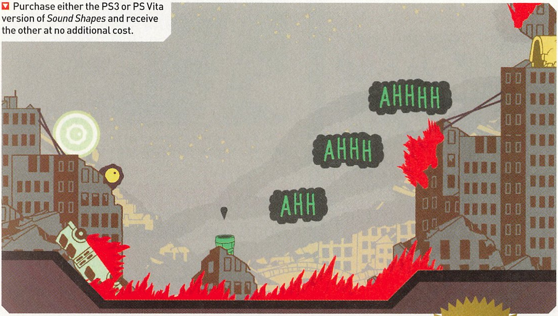




Level creation takes a fresh approach here, as we place not only pieces of the world but various musical notes as well.

Purchase either the PS3 or PS Vita version of *Sound Shapes* and receive the other at no additional cost.



Sound Shapes

Music in motion

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Info

Format PS Vita/PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Queasy Games/SCE Santa Monica
Price $14.99 (download only)
ESRB Everyone
It's like a trippy visual mix tape.

In the span of just two PSN releases, Queasy Games has mastered the art of crafting brilliant music games that have little in common with the usual beat-matching rhythm affairs that populate the genre. With *Everyday Shooter*, creator Jonathan Mak used the classic twin-stick shooter as a template for a one-of-a-kind game that offered a distinctly dreamy look and objectives, plus enemy kill sounds that formed an oddly soothing aural backdrop. *Sound Shapes* isn't similar on the surface, but that very same hook—creating music through play across wildly varied terrain—propels this engaging experience on both PS Vita and PS3.

Here side-scrolling platforming is largely utilized as a means to an end. While there's a final destination in each stage and myriad hazards found along the way, the missions' true impact stems from being designed like singular, abstract music videos for a wide array of tunes. As we guide the sticky, rolling ball along walls and through the world, any coins collected breathe life into the soundtrack via added beats and notes, essentially building the song and offering ample reason to snag everything in sight.

As much as the music itself sets the tone, it's the paired visual accompaniment that makes each stage feel truly individual, utilizing song-inspired iconography to create fresh settings and even gameplay elements along the way. Stages based on musician Beck's songs offer perhaps the most literal interpretations (spoken words turn into dynamic platforms and themes into desolate cityscapes with beat-matched missiles and wrecking balls), but the end result proves marvelously affecting all the same. Even levels based on tracks from DJ/producer Deadmau5 reflect his iconic visual style, while several other stages use original songs to effectively build unique obstacles around the simplistic roll-and-jump approach.

Sound Shapes is more of an experiential platformer than one in which challenge is a key component, but that laid-back approach works well considering the focus on creating aesthetic wonder with each action. And play is only part of the game, as level building is a total breeze here, with various notes and elements (unlocked via completed levels) that let us construct our own meaningful mashups. It's particularly satisfying on Vita, where the back panel is used to move and adjust pieces, but *Sound Shapes* otherwise plays identically across platforms.

While well-priced, *Sound Shapes*' brief musical masterworks left us wanting much more. With luck, this initial release will prove to be much like that of *LittleBigPlanet:* a platform that can support a diverse and enchanting array of both official and user-created content for some time to come.

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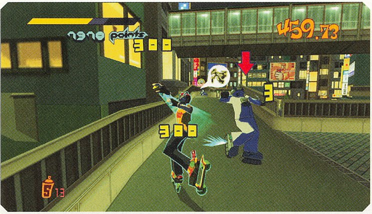
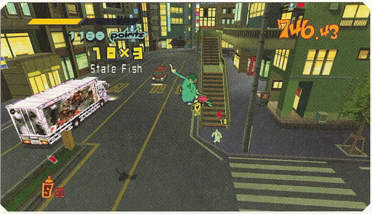
ANDREW HAYWARD

Jet Set Radio

Where skating meets street art



The soundtrack is widely hailed as one of the best in gaming history, in part because it suits the game so perfectly.



Info
Format PSN
Pub Sega **Dev** Smilebit
Price $9.99 **ESRB** Teen
It's like a cheeky '90s teen flick with skates and spray cans.

When people say *Jet Set Radio* was one of the most unique games of its generation, they're not just talking about its cel-shaded graphics. Sure, the vibrant art style still looks glorious despite debuting on Sega's Dreamcast lo those many years ago (the HD update certainly helps), but it's more than that. It's the entire spirit of the game, a lighthearted yet mischievous tale of street punks on inline skates coating their city with graffiti art as a smirking middle finger to the Man. It's pure innocent fun with a stylish, flippant twist.

The gameplay—despite allowing us to execute high-flying tricks and grinds—plays more like a rhythm/puzzle game than an extreme sports title. Most levels task us with covering rival gangs' tags with our own art, leaving us to collect floating spray cans while zipping around intricate environments that challenge us to find a way to access hard-to-reach locations. Exploration and creativity are key. The camera and controls can feel wonky at times (like in any tight space) despite players now being able to fully rotate and control their view, but the infectious beats of DJ Professor K washed all our frustrations away in no time.

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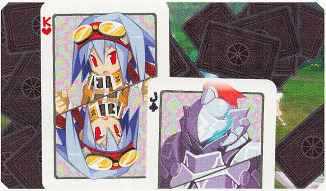
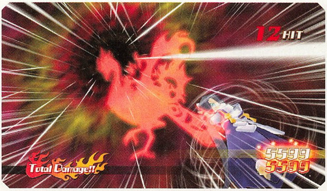
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH





Over-the-top group attacks pack some silly style.

Mugen Souls

If you can't kill 'em, woo 'em

Info

Format PS3
Pub NIS America
Dev Compile Heart
Price $49.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a Japanese space opera on hallucinogens.

A bratty self-proclaimed deity with multiple personalities rallies together a peculiar posse and sets out to dominate the seven worlds in *Mugen Souls*, a wacky JRPG that spices up its more traditional combat and adventure elements with a heavy dose of minion-seducing quirk. Conquering each elemental-themed world and forcing its citizens to submit is more than a mere matter of slicing and dicing (though there's also plenty of that, to be sure). The option of turning foes into mewling peons by donning one of eight saucy personas and selecting phrases based on their mood—and preferred female stereotype—adds a bizarre but amusing twist to battles.

Beneath its bombastic flair, rampant sexual innuendos, crazy dialogue sequences, and goofy self-references to gaming tropes, *Souls* delivers satisfying depth in its turn-based combat encounters both on the ground and in massive flying starships. It's not entirely free from the monotonous grind that's so common to the genre, but the more repetitious moments are balanced by bursts of fun personality and outrageous antics that keep up the zippy pace.

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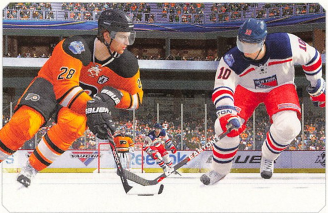
NATHAN MEUNIER



Forechecking and backchecking are improved—but careful not to continuously switch between players (and thus pull them out of position) to engage the puck carrier.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

NHL 13

Raising the level of play

Info

Format PS3
Pub EA Sports **Dev** EA Canada
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+
It's like the fastest game on ice got even slicker.

EA Sports' perennial powerhouse *NHL* series is the only hockey videogame in town, but this year's promised "revolutionary" gameplay enhancements deliver in spades.

We immediately noticed the new True Performance Skating engine's impact, as player momentum is now a huge factor. We initially found it difficult—and somewhat frustrating—to execute hard-angle direction changes, but our skating proficiency improved with more ice time. We also learned that, as in real hockey, if a defenseman steps up and tries to stop a rushing forward head on, he will get "walked."

Defensive A.I., part of the overall Hockey I.Q. improvements, is noticeably better. The defense can easily swat away long stretch passes unless we utilize a saucer pass to make the puck airborne. Goaltending A.I. has also improved: Cutting across the net front once guaranteed an easy goal, but that's no longer the case. Shots from beyond the faceoff circles do seem to get through too frequently, but overall, we were impressed with how well goalies track the puck and cover the net in a variety of situations, including odd man rushes and backdoor pass plays. In one instance, our jaws dropped as Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick made a save by reaching across his body while diving left during a two-on-one play.

When a series' 13th installment leaves us amazed with its highlight moments and has us playing all-nighters again, it's an easy pick-up call. **NORBERT TYDINGCO**

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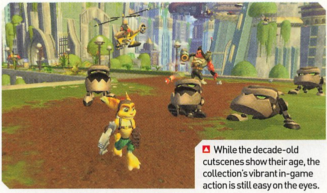

While the decade-old cutscenes show their age, the collection's vibrant in-game action is still easy on the eyes.

Ratchet & Clank Collection

Still fun—and furry—after all these years

Those let down by last year's co-op focused *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One* will find Sony's latest HD compilation is just what Dr. Nefarious ordered. Featuring the iconic action-platforming series' first three entries (*Ratchet & Clank, Going Commando, and Up Your Arsenal*), *Ratchet & Clank Collection* provides plenty of prettied-up, quality content at a bargain price.

On top of the expected visual upgrades, the collection includes Trophies, PSN support for *Up Your Arsenal's* online modes, and a peppy frame rate. That said, it doesn't offer any new bells and whistles beyond 3D support, and its blurry-edged cutscenes don't benefit from the hi-def makeover. Still, it's impossible to deny the enormous appeal of this package when it includes three of the PS2 era's best games. From the core gameplay and sharp writing to the charming characters and Pixar-like presentation, all of the franchise's defining features hold up incredibly well.

Faithful fans who've long since forgotten how the lovable Lombax and his robo-buddy first met or how the series' gameplay focus gradually shifted from inspired platforming to creative combat, will especially enjoy revisiting these old friends. But even for first-timers who aren't craving a nostalgia fix, this one's an easy recommendation. **MATT CABRAL**

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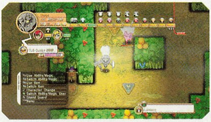
Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Idol Minds/ Insomniac Games
Price $29.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like the best compilation since *Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection.*

Legasista

Format **PS3** Pub **NIS America** Dev **System Prisma** Price **$29.99** ESRB **Teen**



Brisk 2D dungeon crawling wrapped in a simple but charming art style makes wading through *Legasista's* dense storyline and long-winded dialogue a bit more palatable. There's a lot to love about this offbeat action JRPG when it doesn't bog us down in mind-numbing chatter. Swapping party members on the fly as we carve through each colorful, randomly generated dungeon offers a nice level of strategic variety, since each character has their own unique abilities and nuances. We also appreciate the deep item customization system that ties into our party's health. Despite some irritating moments, *Legasista* does possess some cool play concepts. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

PlayStation **7**

Risen 2: Dark Waters

Format **PS3** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **Piranha** Price **$49.99** ESRB **Mature**

Being a dastardly pirate on the high seas should be an excellent departure from standard fantasy tropes. Sadly, *Risen 2's* shoddy execution means this swashbuckling expedition cascades into buggy mediocrity before we've even had a chance to fall in love with its setting. The plot is serviceable enough, with a hefty load of seafaring goodness, but its delivery is lackluster. Worse, exploration and combat carry no real reward. Whether we're battling it out with a cutlass or a musket, there's a lack of weighty clunk to weapons. Quests do occasionally offer intriguing objectives, but they're a rarity, and simple kill/fetch structures are the norm. Walk the plank? Don't mind if we do. **SAM WHITE**

PlayStation **5**

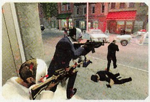
Damage Inc.
Pacific Squadron WWII

Format **PS3** Pub **Mad Catz** Dev **Trickstar Games**
Price **$49.99/$99.99** ESRB **Teen**

Following in the tradition of *Blazing Angels* and *Ace Combat, Damage Inc.* is a solid take on action-focused WWII air combat. Some levels tend to go on too long, but the action looks excellent and the game caters to both harder-core and more casual players. The special edition's flight stick felt a tad imprecise, but it's serviceable and offers decent value, or just defaulting to a standard DualShock to play works great too. With over 10 hours of old-time warbird campaign action (longer for completionists), 30-plus planes, and online multiplayer, it's worth taking a turn in *Damage Inc.'s* cockpit. **JASON D'APRILE**

PlayStation **7**

DLC Roundup



PAYDAY: The Heist Wolfpack

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

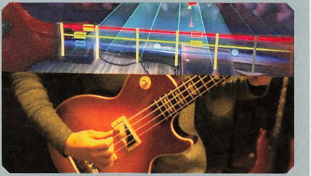
Awesome weapons like a deployable sentry gun and grenade launcher are only a few of the goodies found in Wolfpack, a grab bag of *PAYDAY* goodness. Two crazy new heists also let us go undercover in the Florida heat to rip off the IRS and counterfeit beaucoup greenbacks.

Quantum Conundrum The Desmond Debacle

Price **$2.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Another meaty dose of brain-bending puzzle adventure awaits in *Quantum Conundrum's* first DLC offering. Return to Quadwrangle Manor's halls to puzzle through an unexplored sector of the building and put cognitive and platforming skills to the test.

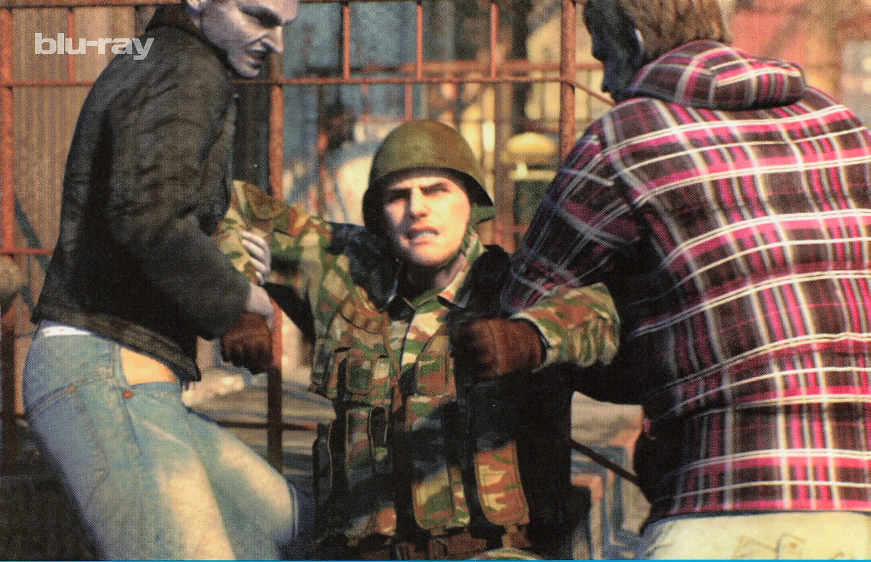
Download of the Month



Rocksmith Bass Expansion

Price **$29.99** ESRB **Teen**

Until now, *Rocksmith* has been a one-musical-instrument affair that lets us connect any real electric guitar to shred through a ton of tunes while teaching us how to play the songs for real. But now, fans of low-end ruckus get equal time and recognition. This expansion adds bass arrangements to all of *Rocksmith's* in-game and DLC tracks and comes with numerous amp and tone gadgets to fiddle with..



Resident Evil Damnation

More signs of life than the live-action films

Info

Price $30.99
Creators Shotaro Suga, Hiroyuki Kobayashi
Starring Matthew Mercer, Courtenay Taylor, and Salli Saffioti
Rated R
Extras Gag reel, previews, and featurettes.

Set to whet gamer's appetites for *Resident Evil 6*, Capcom's CG-animated *Resident Evil* movie series continues to prove far better than its awful live-action counterpart. In *Damnation*, Leon S. Kennedy is back for more abuse. Set in a former Soviet-bloc nation paralyzed by civil war, the violence ramps up when rebels start using Umbrella Corporation's bio-organic weapons. Introducing leader variants and plenty of cool-looking bad things to blow up, *Damnation* manages to stay within the game world while still being entertaining.

The whole movie looks and feels like an extended cinematic sequence from one of the games. The dialogue is frequently stilted and silly (especially the "dramatic" bits), but the action sequences are excellent. Fans will be especially appreciative of the screen time other characters from the series receive; Ada Wong plays a relatively big secondary role and has the best fight scenes—especially against a badass female national leader, who proves to be every bit Ada's fighting equal.

Beyond that, the monsters look great—even if there's not a lot of variety between the creatures. The Nemesis variant is a terrific and frighteningly huge Soviet giant, and the movie presents them in an amazingly realistic fashion. There's no shortage of clichéd, last-second escapes from explosions with the world bending just enough around Leon for him to survive, but given the source material, this isn't a significant complaint.

The plot focuses on the themes and elements that *Resident Evil* is known for—conspiracies, corruption, and greed, all involving the creation of hideous monsters. This isn't high entertainment by any means. Yet where the live-action movies have gone off completely from the source material into an ever-more-insipid spiral, *Damnation* succeeds because it stays so grounded to its origins.

Leon is a likably gruff hero as well, and while some of the characters are just terrible stereotypes, everyone feels like they could just as easily have been plucked directly from one of the games. Voice-actor geeks will note that Matthew Mercer (Leon) and Courtenay Taylor (Ada) reprise their roles in *Resident Evil 6* and have a plethora of game work to their names.

There aren't a ton of extras here, but obvious plugs for *RE6* abound, including a voice-acting gag reel and a couple of featurettes. **JASON D'APRILE**

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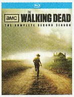
The Walking Dead

Season 2

The bleakest apocalypse on TV



Info

Price $69.99
Creators Glen Mazzarra, Gale Anne Hurd
Starring Andrew Lincoln, Sarah Wayne Callies
Rated NR **Extras** Featurettes, deleted scenes, webisodes.

Apocalypse stories tend to be the same, no matter the exact cause of humanity's virtual extinction. Humans struggle, fight against each other more than anyone or anything else, and find brief glimmers of hope to struggle on—only to have that hope horribly squashed. It's not a genre known for happy endings, and *The Walking Dead* takes that ideology to heart.

The show unabashedly embraces its horror roots—not so much due to shambling zombies, but because the story is relentless in the oppression of its characters and, by extension, its viewers. Any minor victory is inevitably followed by an even greater tragedy, and it gets more than a little tiresome by the second season's midpoint. The show's doggedly slow pacing only makes matters worse.

The Walking Dead does a superb job of showing the day-to-day existence of the survivors of a burned-out, cursed earth. As such, every run for supplies, every encounter with strangers, and every interaction with fellow survivors is fraught with drama—just not fast-paced drama. The main plot of the first half of the season is focused on the search for a lost girl, but every lead inevitably ends up with the characters in a worse situation than before.

Yet for all the criticism of the show's slow pacing and wallowing in despair, *The Walking Dead* is undeniably engaging. The drama feels real, the acting is excellent, and when the zombies strike, there is a palatable feeling of dread. The show manages to twist its characters around in intelligent and sometimes frustrating ways, but no matter what happens, it's hard not to care about their fate.

Season 2 works well overall, even if it moves in zombie-like fits and starts, and it's far more uncompromising in its vision of horror than anything else on TV. For that alone, the show deserves respect. Fans will also enjoy the slew of bonus materials that include behind-the-scenes shorts, commentary tracks, and deleted scenes. JD

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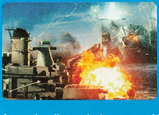
Blu-ray Roundup

The Dictator

Price: $39.99 **Rated:** R/Not Rated

Wrong on every level and yet brilliantly funny and astute, *The Dictator* is one of the best and boldest comedies of the year—despite how frequently it ventures far beyond the accepted boundaries of taste and morality. The movie definitely isn't for the sensitive or easily offended. 8



Battleship

Price $34.98 **Rated** PG-13

It's not surprising a movie based off a board game is bad, but *Battleship* seems like a movie pieced together from the discarded scenes of *Transformers* movies. As such, it looks good, but the script is inane and the action ridiculous. 4

Quick

Price $26.97 **Rated** Not Rated

An uneven action movie from Korea, *Quick* feels like an ode to 1980s-era car-wreck-laden American action flicks. There's not a whit of sense here and the humor frequently seems maniacal, but strangely, all the goofy nonsense has a certain charm to it. 6

Jaws

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

Still brilliant after all these years, *Jaws* isn't just the greatest shark movie ever made; it's a great movie, period. Intelligent, intense, and still thoroughly watchable, the Blu-ray transfer is terrific with its remastered sound and audio. Plentiful extras make this BD a feeding frenzy for collectors. 9

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

Geneva Sound System Model XS

For the discerning traveler who likes to bring tunes along, the XS is a compact Bluetooth speaker that sounds much bigger than it is, folds up into its own case, has an FM radio, and shows the time.

$250

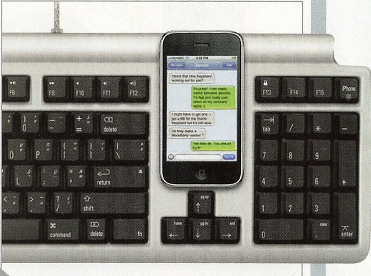
genevalab.com

Matias Tactile One Keyboard

Instantly switch between typing on an iPhone and a PC or Mac with one click. Unlike contemporary competitors, each key is built with an individual Alps mechanical keyswitch for a classic, responsive feel.

$200

matias.ca



BlueAir Sense

Now the Swedes are cleaning our air. The body of this air purifier is made from recyclable glass and steel, and the top has a scratchproof surface with integrated motion controls: swipe a hand above the tempered glass to turn the purifier on and off.

$380

blueair.com

littleBits

LEGOs for the electronic generation, the littleBits collection includes pieces that light up, buzz, sense, and churn. The modules snap together using built-in magnets (no soldering) to form larger circuits that will inspire kids and adults alike.

$25 and up

littlebits.cc

Pear Sports Square One

The Square One's sole purpose is to fine-tune training and workouts. Effectively a personal trainer that fits an iPod Shuffle, the package also includes a wireless heart-rate monitor and footpad. Now: run.

$250

pearsports.com

Sony ICD-SX712D Digital Recorder

Record high-quality audio in the smallest form-factor yet. The recorder's omnidirectional mic captures audio from any angle, and 2GB of memory (expandable to 16GB) offers ample storage.

$200

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This month we talk past, present, *and* future with a serious batch of letters from some very serious fans

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

PS3 | PSP | PS VITA
PlayStation The Official Magazine
14 FRESH IDEAS
REVIEWED
IN ASSASSINS WE TRUST
ASSASSIN'S CREED III
The revolution continues on PS3 and Vita
SPLINTER CELL DEAD SPACE 3 STAR WARS 1313 NEED FOR SPEED

Is it weird that this cover makes us feel more patriotic than all those Olympic gold medals Team USA won?

Unreal Expectations

Unreal Engine 4 will revolutionize gaming, so it pays to wait a couple of years for it on the PS4 than to buy substandard games now. The games now are repetitive and get boring in 10 minutes because the graphics stay the same and cannot be exponentially enhanced. Unreal 4 will change all that if it becomes as ubiquitous as rumored. **STEVE E.** THE INTERNET

Well, a few things, Steve: First of all, while early examples of Unreal 4's potential look promising, we really have no idea what kind of impact this new engine will have. Will games look better than ever before? Most likely. Will it be an earth-shattering paradigm shift for the entire medium? Who knows—it's just too early to make those sorts of predictions. Second, graphics aren't everything. Even if PS4 games look substantially better than today's offerings, that doesn't invalidate all the fun and emotion packed into PS3's truly great games. If graphics are all that matter, why are people still playing Final Fantasy VII*? Finally, there will always be new tech just over the horizon. By the time Unreal 4 takes off, Unreal 5 will already be in the works. If you're constantly waiting for the next big thing, you'll never end up playing any games at all. Just enjoy what you can while you can.*

This Unreal 4-generated monster looks cool, but that doesn't mean the PS3 is finished.

Circle of Life

This is somewhat old news by now, but I was surprised that you did not at all cover the recent collapse of 38 Studios and its relationship with the state of Rhode Island. Of course, news on software and hardware is what drives your sales, but I would guess most readers would enjoy and appreciate this sort of industry analysis. Granted, I work in Rhode Island, so perhaps this is more of a local story. **TRUESON** THE INTERNET

Actually, Trueson, we typically don't cover studio closures because there's just not much to say beyond, "This studio has closed, and boy that sucks." Plus, heartbreaking as it may seem, it's really not unusual for a studio to dissolve after completing a major project. Fortunately, another development team somewhere else in the industry often absorbs members of the closing studio, so the situation's not entirely tragic. It's just a part of the crazy job cycle within the games industry.

Luddites Unite

I don't get why everyone wants a PS4. Seriously, what the heck is wrong with the PS3? It is an amazing machine and still has not been pushed to its full limits. It still has a good many years left. And another thing: People want this PS4 so bad, but do they forget that when the PS3 was announced, it was priced at almost $600?! What do you think the PS4 will cost?? $40? No, it will be more than half a grand, and for what? Better graphics? PS3 has amazing graphics. Better engines? PS3 has still not been pushed far enough. I'd rather see Sony come out with a second slim for the PS3, like PS3.5 with just a slightly improved engine. Sorry for my rant, but I'm just tired of hearing about the "next gen" when the one we're on is perfect! **WESLEY** THE INTERNET

Wow, are you like Steve's mortal enemy or something? We're going to give you the opposite advice: People are always

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going to be excited about what comes next. It's only natural! We love PS3, and we're optimistic that PS4 will be even better. However, you're right that we can still get plenty of miles out of our current-gen system. Even after PS4 comes out, we imagine a lot of gamers will continue to use PS3 as their main console. So don't fret—when the next console generation hits, feel free to kick back and wait for a price drop while enjoying all that PS3 still has to offer. Just don't spoil it for anyone else while you're at it.

wut

when are u done making black ops 2 magizine

COREY THE INTERNET

ಠ_ಠ

DIY or Die

Editors of PTOM, I come to you with a problem. I'm sure every gamer who has ever touched a controller has imagined, at some point in their lives, an idea for a videogame. I assume most of us who share our ideas do so within our circle of friends and such, and that's where it stops. Sadly, I think that's where many great and genre-redefining ideas end. I have a friend (they will remain anonymous) who comes to me with excellent game ideas and concepts that I think are very publisher-worthy, and I wish I could help him/her out. Unfortunately, I don't know many people in the game development industry and as such cannot help bring my friend's ideas to another, more serious level. My question for you is this: what resources, if any, are available to commoners like my friend and I (and possibly other PTOM readers) so that my friend can be taken seriously for his/her remarkable game ideas?

A CONCERNED READER THE INTERNET

We've said it before and we'll say it again: build your own games. Or, barring that, learn to program or draw, work your butt off to land a job in the games industry, and start to work your way up the food chain. Most publishers aren't looking for unsolicited ideas; they're simply not going to listen to someone they don't know and trust. Your ideas may be the best anyone has ever heard, but you've got to earn the right to put them into action. As far as resources go, start simple: join the computer club, take an art class, do whatever you can to get started working towards your goals. And tell your "friend" to get all these ideas down on paper now—who knows when they might come in handy?

Style vs. Substance Redux

I respect your opinions on all games you review. But I think you misled a large audience of gamers with your review of *Lollipop Chainsaw* in issue 061 in August. I know that the game isn't *Bayonetta* in terms of deep combat and combos or whatever, but its charm makes it very appealing to others who personally dislike the genre that it's in. I really disliked *Bayonetta* and games like it. But *Chainsaw's* lack of "fluid combos" really doesn't matter to gamers in terms of story. You guys are focused on gameplay and you saw flaws and fluff, but I saw random acts of crazy that a lot of story-oriented (not *Heavy Rain*, but you get the idea) gamers would like to play. All I'm saying is that some gamers aren't all about combos, and the linearity and "shoehorned" gameplay weren't all that tragic. Overall, I give *Chainsaw* a "9" for insanity and charm over your "6" because of un-*Bayonetta* qualities and problems with insane cheerleading and pole-dancing.

ASCOT MAIR THE INTERNET

We are waaaay ahead of you here, Ascot. From the reviews intro page of that same issue: "We always try to embrace whatever a particular game does well. Yet in some cases, we may not love the style enough to forgive the gameplay flaws... But maybe for you, the gameplay won't matter. Just ask yourself: style or substance?" It's all a matter of taste. We weren't trying to mislead gamers; we're just offering our opinion. And clearly it didn't dissuade you from playing the game, so in the end, it all worked out.

Ask Roger

Q **I recently bought the Kindle Fire, and I've seen Future is your parent company, with other magazines on Kindle. Will they let PTOM on the Kindle Fire, and if so, when?**

ARTHUR
THE INTERNET

A The PTOM digital edition is now available on Kindle, as well as Apple Newsstand, Google Play, and Zinio!

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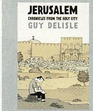
Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Bill & Ted 3

"Certain movies are—sometimes inexplicably—fondly remembered. *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* is one such flick for me. As such, news of a third film in the works with Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter is... bodacious. Be excellent to each other, dudes."

ROGER BURCHILL



Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City

"Guy Delisle's autobio-comic travelogues of such troubled countries as Burma and North Korea are relentlessly engaging, funny, and eye-opening. *Jerusalem* may be his best yet, giving us a cheerfully relatable perspective on the often-bleak realities of life in Israel."

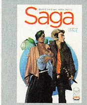
MIKEL REPARAZ

Ben Sherman
www.bensherman.com

Ben Sherman

"After a lifetime of oversized t-shirts and ripped-up jeans, I've finally started to up my sartorial game, thanks in large part to the sharp shirts of Ben Sherman. Part mod, part rocker, all British. Get into it."

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



Saga

"*Saga* is a visually stunning science fiction meets fantasy epic about two lovers from opposite sides of a war and their newborn daughter, who try to flee from countless people out to kill or capture them." **ANNE LEWIS**

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

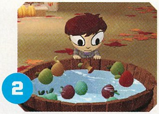
1

A Beautiful Death

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. This platformer melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often, but never feel frustrated.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**



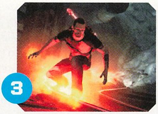
2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, *Quest* is Halloween-themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary RPG is a charming homage to classics like *Final Fantasy*, enhanced by developer Tim Schafer's trademark sense of humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**



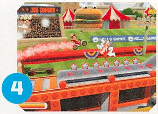
3

Frightening Lightning

inFamous
Festival of Blood

This standalone spinoff sees *inFamous* hero Cole MacGrath facing off against vampires. At stake? (groan) Cole's very own soul. It's enough to make vampires fashionably cool again—in spite of *Twilight*.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sucker Punch**



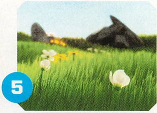
4

Thrills and Spills

Joe Danger

An enthralling mix of *Excitebike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous on a motorbike has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**



5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game turns blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest AAA offerings. Consider it a suitable substitute for a bouquet for your loved one.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

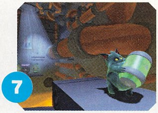
6

Pixel Perfection

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien- and rock-blasting galore, the fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental-puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our minds and our reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**



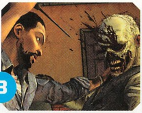
7

Brain Strainer

Quantum Conundrum

The latest mindbender from developer Kim Swift, one of the masterminds behind the iconic *Portal* puzzle franchise, *Conundrum* has us navigate a mysterious mansion by shifting dimensions—each possessing its own unique physics-manipulating property.

9 Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Airtight Games**



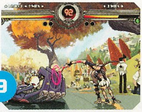
8

Has Heart, Wants Brains

The Walking Dead
Episode 1-A New Day

Licensed games are usually horrific, and not in the good way. *The Walking Dead* bucks the trend with a riveting episodic adventure marked by an engrossing narrative, life-changing decisions, and heart-pounding showdowns with zombie hordes.

9 Pub **Telltale Games**
Dev **Telltale Games**



9

Ladies' (Fight) Night

Skullgirls

With the fighting genre in the midst of a resurgence, it's nice to see a new IP join the fray. *Skullgirls* features a cast of eight hand-drawn, superpowered femme fatales in glorious 2D and offers an enticing mix of accessibility and depth. Don't overlook this one.

9 Pub **Konami / Autumn Games**
Dev **Reverge Labs**

10

We Are Not Alone

Journey

The hauntingly beautiful and atmospheric *Journey* has us wandering a desert to reach a distant mountain. Along the way, we may or may not encounter and wordlessly communicate with fellow travelers who can aid us in our quest. Is this a game or a metaphor for life?

8 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

PS Vita

Essential collection

The most powerful handheld ever is here. Get the best of it with the games we've given two thumb[stick]s up to

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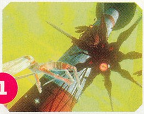
BEST FULL GAMES



1

Falling Skyward

Gravity Rush

Use a gravity-defying cat to break every single law of physics and zoom across the skies of a floating steampunk city. With comic-book visuals that just ooze style all over the place, *Gravity Rush* is everything you and your Vita have always wanted.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE Japan Studio**

2

Stays On Rhythm

Lumines Electronic Symphony

Part block-puzzler, part on-the-go disco, this throbbing audiovisual feast is as certain to have you nodding along to amazing tunage as it is to keep you coming back for more reflex-testing, square-clearing action.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Q Entertainment**

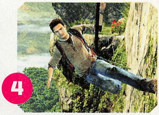
3

Stealth Espionage

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

Two of PS2's finest adventures scale down beautifully, with pint-sized neck-snapping and enough cutscenes to fill a transatlantic flight. With the addition of Trophies and cleaned-up visuals, now there's even less excuse not to play.

8 Pub **Konami**
Dev **Armature Studio**



4

Jungle Hunt

Uncharted Golden Abyss

Drake proves he's just as adept on the go, with screen size no impediment to another epic adventure. A prequel story that sends Drake to South America, this one's full of that's classic jungle action, and typical *Uncharted* charm.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sony Bend**

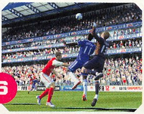
5

Hand-Drawn Hijinks

Rayman Origins

He of no limbs finds the perfect home on Vita's OLED screen. Missing only the multiplayer from its PS3 counterpart, its beautiful visuals and flawless platforming make *Rayman* a handheld delight of quirky cartoon ridiculousness.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **UBIart Montpelier**



6

Pitch Perfect

FIFA Soccer

This serving of portable footie may lack some of *FIFA 12's* bells and whistles—most notably manual tackling and the Player Impact Engine. Nevertheless, it's a robust package, with touchscreen passing and shooting controls that set it apart and make it the best of Vita's launch library..

10 Pub **EA Sports**
Dev **Electronic Arts**

7

Growing Threat

Tales from Space Mutant Blobs Attack

Simple but gloriously addictive. Beginning with a tiny ball of goo, we gradually make it grow to vast proportions and consume the paranoid little town that spawned it, all while taking in the pop-culture zingers in the background.

9 Pub **DrinkBox Studios**
Dev **DrinkBox Studios**

8

Surround Shooting

Super Stardust Delta

HR policy means heroin use is frowned upon, but we can't imagine this is any less addictive. A brilliant port of the PSN twin-stick shooter, *Delta* is just as frantic and explosive as its console cousin, meaning you'll never stop scratching the high-score itch.

8 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **XDEV**

9

Side-View Smackdown

BlazBlue Continuum Shift Extend

There's almost *too much* content here—the wealth of game modes is a nerdgasm for fans, the fighting system is absurdly deep, the visuals are beautifully animated, and the characters are insanely diverse.

8 Pub **Aksys Games**
Dev **Arc System Works**

10

Impossible Speed

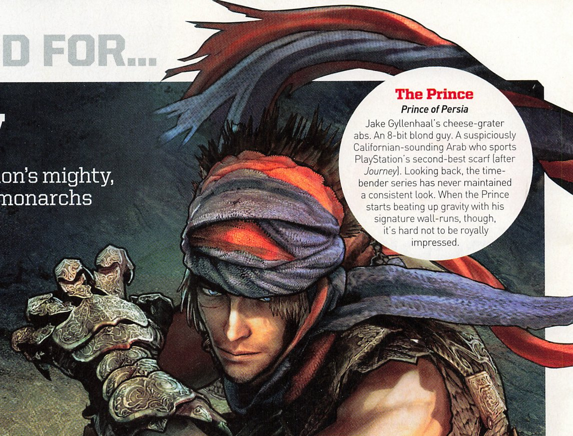
Wipeout 2048

The series' futuristic hovering action has rarely looked better, thanks to the clarity Vita's OLED screen brings to the party. Every bit as fast and handsome as PSN's *Wipeout HD* (and, on certain tracks, playable against it), this is everything a portable Wipeout should be.

8 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Studio Liverpool**

Royalty

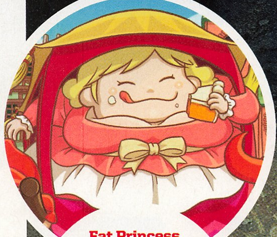
Kneeling before PlayStation's mighty, occasionally murderous, monarchs



The Prince

Prince of Persia

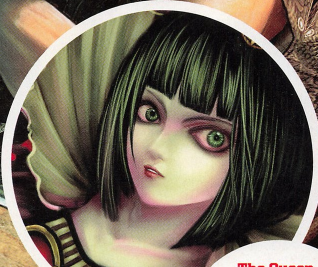
Jake Gyllenhaal's cheese-grater abs. An 8-bit blond guy. A suspiciously Californian-sounding Arab who sports PlayStation's second-best scarf (after *Journey*). Looking back, the time-bender series has never maintained a consistent look. When the Prince starts beating up gravity with his signature wall-runs, though, it's hard not to be royally impressed.



Fat Princess

Fat Princess

Let them eat cake. Actually, in this instance, your highness, we'd suggest stepping away from the pastry. Cruelly kept victims caught up in a conflict between warring tribes, PSN's portly royals are force-fed baked goods. Not only does this plump them up, it also makes them way harder to kidnap and carry off.



The Queen of Hearts

Alice: Madness Returns

Where Lewis Carroll's lover of decapitated heads was a little unhinged, she has nothing on American McGee's gal. In the original game, the monarch of Wonderland was part controlled puppet/part tentacled beast. Mercifully, she's merely a little girl with sucky octopus appendages in *Returns*.

King & Queen of All Cosmos

***Katamari* series**

We've had benders that've ended in burnt pizza, but we've never got so drunk we wiped out all the galaxy's celestial bodies. After a bout of binge-drinking, the King (who met his wife while she was delivering bread) tells his son to roll around a ball to suck up enough junk to create new stars.

Queen Brahne

Final Fantasy IX

Manipulated into creating an army of Black Mages by an evil gun-runner after the death of her king, it's not surprising Brahne hits the fantasy fridge. Known as the Elephant Lady, this crazed queen even tries to kill her adopted daughter. She does eventually find remorse, though, right after she's offed by hero Zidane.

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"OUR HIDING PLACES DIMINISHED… …WE TURNED TO HOPE… …BUT SHE HAS FLED…"

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